

# **SECOND WORLD: A LIFE**

A POEM

In four parts

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## **BOOK ONE: LIGHTSTREAMINGS**

## LIGHTSTREAMINGS

This sunny breeze  
the white lace curtain  
fills  
then falls

This moment  
of warm breeze  
of warmth and light

I lie beside you  
having one thought only

A rhythm an impulse  
a process

felt continuity  
completely realized  
at last

this  
has led me here

And therefore I enter light and warmth  
your skin is warm

and has its own soft light

as though

the sunny breeze  
which is both light

and air

had taken form

a warmth I enter and a light I touch

I wait for when the curtain

next will fill

and then fall back

A woman

a warm breeze

A breath

I sat there

by the window that afternoon

the day was hot and bright

harsh blue of sky

noon heat's shimmer on the street

a glare of yellow

spokes of sunlight

shifting through the treetop

in the leaves there was a stippling glare of sun

and it was burning      the tree  
and the treetop was swaying

in the afternoon's hot dry breeze

I sat there thinking

in that place  
that afternoon      that time

deep the center  
within

subsistence      breathing

within

the center

I thought

myself

as myself

and

there was a clarity

like the clarity of light

no more the darkness of a child

a space      opened

gradually

had already

light to think of it as? as time?

as day

No longer I I merely yet I

still and still still

I watched waited

looking seeing

visibility itself seeing it

time space

space-light

radiant there

treetop moving

wind sound in the leaves

Blue sky

Now

and then

just now

it is

it was

is

it

no word

now

There was no

And yet

Word

spoken somewhere

in some movement

Within what often speaks

Something beneath movement

though not really

not that

thought perhaps    language    self    not  
self still

blue    enigma    sky

green enigma earth

memory

But the spring is

the season of new present

the purple lilac    laden    near the fence

wavers in the wind

just newly mild

that sight

not an enigma  
but experience of fact    see it there

luminous in day    time-space    light

So rich that lilac color almost blue

clusters of light purple  
against the bright white shingles of the house  
that glare in the morning sun

on the line white sheets still damp  
flap in the breeze like sails

The breeze comes from the north  
and brings the feel of activity  
although the air's still cool  
and there is a sharpness

a clarity everywhere

The air is clean and bright  
the sun a hard bright light  
unmixed with too much warmth

And so in this moment of spring brightness

the crisp breeze flapping the white sheet  
that dries in the sun slowly  
and grows just noticeably warm to the touch  
as noon comes on

and yet the air still has its edge of cold

In a time

that is both cool and warm  
upon the skin

we move about in the bright sunlight  
and fresh air

And in the running light  
we sail off to where?

This activity in the air  
and breathing  
and in the mind thought  
visibility itself  
for moving in clean air  
I breathe the scent  
of earth so deeply in  
now risen up again  
fragrance of damp earth  
countless the scent of flowers  
of mud and grass and rain  
the unpredictable dissemination renewal  
in the air  
and in each breath  
and in the mind as well  
the sources open and we move through them  
in this moment of sunlight  
and of spring  
warmth  
in this instant  
this breath of time  
they cannot close

Sources underground  
washed by rain  
that trickles through the soil  
the run-off water  
at the first spring thaw  
and later when the March and April rains  
have soaked the soil through  
the buds of the earth flush  
open  
to the running streams  
the rain  
activity  
a kind of warmth  
as roots of trees  
the complicated  
roots  
ganglia of earthen threads respond  
and tubers move from sleep

I drift in the night  
in the waters of the night  
which are my sleep  
which are  
the waters of energy moving through  
stillness  
like sound across still water  
almost infinite echo after echo  
ripples moving outward on a pond  
concentrically

for when one dreams one listens  
dreaming is listening

But to what?

what is it that you hear?

what is it moving upward through plateaus of water

through the roots of earth

subterranean sources

depths and darkness of the body itself

to move within the corridors of mind  
that is no longer mind and not yet mind

neither of body nor of mind

this energy this source  
although within each breath

it can be felt  
and heard

as with  
an ear against the ground

or heard as

music in the mind is heard   silently  
felt music

Now stand and

feel each breath  
an inner power   pressed

downward

to your stomach through your legs  
to some deep point within the earth

That is how deep you go

and upward likewise

the heart the egress of the throat  
the processes of thought

the center of a sphere  
of many spheres moving outward to

the edges of the horizon  
This is the measure of how far  
how deep you go

the depths  
the extensions  
the realms  
to which you must respond  
which must respond to you  
even if not in kind

With rain  
and whipping leaves  
and the random energy of wind  
the summer storm declares itself  
moving through the night outside  
The tops of the trees sway  
moments of a force that moves  
through them  
in currents gathered from minute events  
accumulating power



with being  
and with thought

Thought and each thought  
or even each thing I see  
a seed

which blossoms finally  
in dreams  
And so it is that thoughts arise in me  
through mingling  
of self and world of mind and world  
of body and the hazards of the world

And from this mingling the seed of dreams

And so I listening to the sound  
which is my dream  
(and  
is it many voices?

What do I hear?)  
attempt to know the world by what it gives – dreams,  
and the fact dreamed

We bought a quart of cherries that afternoon  
And sat out in the arbor behind the garage  
Eating them and talking

the sun was bright  
But a cool breeze blew across us through the leaves  
and latticework

just every now and then

Washed and in a metal bowl  
they shined just faintly  
almost imperceptibly  
but brilliant if you looked

Glossy and wet deep red the very darkest red  
almost like black  
they shone with a kind of dark light  
in the arbor's darkness

The splendor of something alien  
if only for a moment

How firm they were to the touch  
a tough resilient minutely veined inside  
torn in the teeth and bleeding its red blood  
almost like human blood

although it's sweet not salty  
has no affinity with tears  
is too thin to clot and has no need to

You took one then bit into it  
and then spit out the pit  
then stared at the open half there in your hand  
your face was partly hidden in green shadows  
but your hair was touched with the yellow and gold  
sunlight  
that threw its checker work  
on the green picnic table  
and on the brown scuffed dirt and on the grass  
and then I took one too



black shapes  
fluttering  
in the occasional breeze

We lie here together  
we two alone  
and no one knows we're here

I will enter you head to foot  
and you  
will accept  
contain encompass become

What you had lacked before  
I will become what I had lacked

Shadows over shadows over  
shadows  
interpenetrate transformed transfigured

Transformed  
momentarily the pulse is touched  
the life is motivated

Outside the night moves silently about  
outside the breeze moves in the night

Leaves flutter in the occasional breeze  
the stars are so bright so many and so clear  
detailed precise

There are so many stars  
amid the shadows  
which are powers  
presences moving through the night  
you sense them know them hear them  
and the night is made of them

Shadows over shadows

and many innumerable stars the stars you see  
and those which have gone dark

What better place for thinking than an arbor?

It's not for nothing that they say  
one's thoughts turn green in a green shade  
or might perhaps

If one were quiet enough and calm  
and maybe shrewd as well  
enough to put all sense of loss away   disquiet  
  
and remorse   reflection   remembrance   time  
  
the jagged shrapnel   the sharp shards of glass  
which are the elements of pain

if they are picked out of my eye  
and some healing fluid   like salve   like tears  
ran down and washed all clean and bare

What would I see?  
in that reconstructed newness   what would there be?

I sat there in the arbor  
among the shadows   the leaves

There were  
grape vines  
with their broad easily agitated leaves  
and underneath  
the knotted threads and strings  
and sinews of the vines themselves

Along one wall were trellised roses  
yellow roses soft and rich

I leaned back in the wooden seat  
it wasn't difficult to rest  
for the sun had tired me out that afternoon

And when I closed my eyes  
I saw the after-images of suns  
drifting yellow spots and dazzling splotches

A flash-bulb after-image  
that floated in an undefined black space

And  
gradually  
an image formed

not of the sun  
But luminous  
a geometry clarity  
a fluid light yet solid

And with the wraith of water  
like the smoke of your breath in cold

And then the glare the reflection of sunlight  
a blinding luminous white

a piece of ice I'd seen  
dripping its melt like rain in the February thaw  
the eave drops catching the bright sun

The slightest throb of summer  
in the ice  
    when for an interval the cold breaks  
        the ice thaws partially  
        breaking up  
and the icicles depending from the eaves  
    will steam and drip  
        and thaw in the warm sun  
No run-off water yet  
    there's not been time for that  
just minor glistening streams of ice water  
    all just that moment thawed  
  
Now everything steams   snow banks   puddles  
    the ice-bound turf  
        long-hardened tire tracks  
            in the frozen mud  
  
All steams and streams  
                    glistening and wet  
    in the flash of thaw  
  
And yet the air's still cool  
    though by comparison it has to feel warm  
  
A virtual heat wave you might think when everyone comes  
                    out from winter clothes  
going with jackets open   hats off   no gloves   no scarves  
    who lately were like mummies  
so wrapped you couldn't tell one person from the next in  
    snow storm or clear weather but only knew their clothes  
  
But all that's cast aside   all suddenly irrelevant

as though there'd never been a winter here at all

all open   lightened   easy once again

And at this moment I walk in the warm air  
(as it feels to me)

no gloves or scarf or hat   my jacket opened to the breeze  
across the quad in bright  
sunlight and glittering ice water puddles

And I am going with my boots untied  
perhaps I'll kick them off entirely

The sun comes into me   new warmth comes into me  
the air still cool yet warm enough  
and if not warm enough I make it warm  
moving in the momentary thaw  
in the bright prefiguration of spring

The ice throbs in my hand

Warmth of the sun flows into me  
and flows

Into the ice which melts  
And then is water  
and then vapor

Rising --  
white smoke in the sunny cold

The sun  
puts out its Word

And everything hears the sound

The heavens echoing

they are a ringing bell

And the sound is light

A light came into my room

a winter sunlight without warmth

It was a glare reflected from the ice and snow outside

A cold light through the frozen glass

which rang like a champagne glass struck lightly  
like a Tibetan prayer bowl

and then I couldn't see

There were just circles of yellow light darkened  
like rings of flash-bulb after-blindness

I felt like I was blacking out

The world was woozy and unreal

And there was this light around me

And within the quiet crystal of that room composed of light

It flowed

and I could hear it passing with a streaming sound  
I felt a penetrating warmth come forth

then cold was like a whisper in my ear

I didn't breathe or need to breathe

A flame poured down into my open throat  
a blue and opal-colored flame  
like burning alcohol or lighter fluid lit

It flowed around the edges of my body  
it burned through everything

The walls of outward space were gone  
Meaning's powers signs filling burning cooling

the floor the light the light's switch  
the pillow's shade of green

space was solid  
solid I want to say and laugh  
sounds fill the wall pulsations suffused with light

tympanum

I knock and shadow pulses knock back  
open wide the curtain

reveal the trees so huge  
caging the whole room  
seeming to be considering it

four directions of the compass stream  
like an oil being poured around the sky

the sun is small  
far in its microscopic world

forms and lines burgeon   space-time is evacuated  
filling again   bodies of whatever kind

yet there is only one kind

glisten with tiny flames

The doors of solid substance burning  
burned   were gone

squares circles triangles   like angels   light spots  
sunspots

blackening out I woke up  
waking up I blacked out

I rose falling through the floor ceiling  
my mind outside the house   somewhere  
the floors transparent  
the walls were translucent fire

I walked out over streams of molten glass

And passed through

all the substance of the world streamed in me

I was the mountain  
I was the mountain raining

and water falling   snows   cascades

an avalanche of bees buzzing

I was the mountain raining and buzzing

I was the mountain  
the world was very small

the little thing I scratched at it then heavy

then smoke

And then I walked out of it

O hear my voice  
which comes from where?

Where all things....

But  
From the cloister the personal darkness  
what can come?

What can come  
from this dark room

where I lie awake all night

As I have before  
so many nights  
or when sometimes I'd rise from bed  
and pace the kitchen floor  
and sit there at the table

The faucet leaks

Time dripping in the puddles of the sink

Are just now

Like someone on a summer day

Just watching

I sit there Who?

For that is

what he does what one does

O so late at night you watch the window there

At first all darkness a square of black

And no window at all

for nothing is outside

Darkness within and darkness too without

there is no difference either way and so

The window is a sheet of glass (now black)

framed by a casement

fringed with white curtains

And in the bedroom

likewise

where I've returned

the window is still dark

I sit here in the darkness

in this room

watch for signs of day

for light

to infiltrate the edges of the blinds

And there is color gradually

although by no perceptible process

the window violet

then polar blue and then a grayish lilac  
but glowing

And then a brighter glow  
with streaks of pink and orange

and then a yellow glare

The sun gradually with day  
and day's activity and power  
The question still remaining: Will you go along?

For energy has leaked into the room now in the guise of  
light

but quietly  
like strength increasing gradually with time  
Or time itself  
no longer drop by drop  
but flowing through in increments

A sparkle

a flare

a fire on the slats of the blinds

The leak a stream

And then the burning river of the day

I got up pulled open the blinds opened up the windows

A room of warm sunlight  
all yellow  
but not yellow – radiant

The chair by the window glowing in the ambient light  
an aura all around  
as though I never could have seen it or imagined it before

I reached to touch the back of it  
but saw my hand fall short  
and touch just empty space

And I fell forward with my head on the chair's lap  
(I had it now)

The walls were drifting active vibrant

Did I say empty space?

This space was all warm light  
held innumerable fluid planes streams waves

All burning still and moving very slowly

an atmosphere  
like honey pouring  
and the air like warm champagne  
All full of points of energy  
a thrilling rushing sensation  
that ran through every part of me  
This was the feel of time  
the beauty of all space  
the ardent joy of sunlight

I tried to stand once more  
the room still vivid and yet steady  
and slowly accepting step by step my presence

And then a sudden break

a door left open

and within there was a darker warmth

I couldn't see inside  
my eyes were still seeing the bright sun  
the tingly blackout yellow after-images

gradually saw plum-colored shadows

the purple darkness the room

And then at last her form:

Just risen from the bath and

bending forward at the waist

and looking intently  
at herself

I stepped back she became all shadows once again

One night in the back yard in deep summer

the night was total darkness

Like an eyelid closed

The complex earth scent  
carried on the slightest breeze

Was all I knew

And looking out a ways, I thought --

Are my eyes open? Or have I closed them?

and then --

a spark

another

another

another

another

The merest flake of light  
a wake of sparkling points

gone

pure appearance

less than momentary

gone as soon as recognized

Fireflies

lead the eye on deeper into the night  
where the garden lay

One Saturday my friend and I sat in the cafe

Activity the activity of day  
the general activity  
of coming and going doing undoing  
of no one type or consequence  
but of all types and of all shapes and sorts  
having all results  
a thousand atoms points of consciousness  
amounting to no one collective thing  
and yet no longer single or separate

People of all sorts went by the cafe windows  
as we sat there amid the discreet jazz  
and clink of cup and saucer

The talking in the room amid our conversation  
a flow of energy  
in the context of that place and time  
the many currents in confluence all around  
of other conversations (all going on at once)  
of traffic noise of cars and buses

shouts in the street  
of radios  
music players a thousand conversations more  
tires and brakes trucks shifting gear  
a hundred cars a thousand cars ten thousand cars

exhaust from cars  
and walkers browsers hurries  
collected at street corners  
or dispersed on the park green

And later for us  
the gallery of modern art

Cool and quiet cooler than the park

More quiet than the mind itself

Moving  
Through its corridors its galleries its rooms  
And rooms following  
leading on to other works  
More paintings more exhibits

We wondered  
can there be a labyrinth of beauty?

And then a panel or a large portal

The foreground a bright room

The sunny yellow paint that glows like real light

A radiance all but bewildering

There is a sense of life lived there in that space

The open window and the chair nearby



that yet shines  
    glances through it  
                    past it  
    around it

consider the eyelids then

    the eyes now closed delicate  
    the skin  
        an opal pink playing  
in those realms of color that it has

It is a medium of light, the skin  
    touched now with visible warmth

Or then the mouth  
    or the softly throbbing places near the throat

The throat itself for words  
    which are the evidences of the mind  
the shoulders narrow, graceful  
    and then the slender arms

The pale pink nipples like crinkled rose petals  
                                    pink and slight  
these an evidence that this in itself  
                            is not all  
                            cannot be all  
but something must come after it  
    living beyond it in a new time  
carrying its beauty there made new again  
    inexhaustible beauty, undying beauty

Then there too across the chest the vascular flush  
    that moves as with a spreading warmth

ardent acquiescence  
adrift in that special medium  
as though a dream  
twilight consciousness  
and dream

how you desire this but why exactly?  
the inner petals orchid-like

feelings are  
what are they?

a fluid and glittering substance  
like to a fountain of  
iridescent foam spattered

beautiful the vial broken  
and overflowing  
running like streams  
along the contours of that body

erotic flower  
spread naked to the star filled night  
yet folded as though in dream

Searching out radiance  
I went along the shore  
to see the hollowed bowls  
the newly filled up pools

The smallest thing I wanted -- a fragment of the sea

the water is so clear when framed in rock  
the rock

through the sunny pane of water, luminous

too clear and shallow to reflect  
what can it be but water?

no more than water and no less

There's plenty more where that came from

for here the sea is the Pacific

from here there is just water  
mile after mile of tropic sea

murmuring in calms of indigo midnight

with only a breathing swell

And in the noon the blue the blue-green bright fields

white foam and silver sparkle

Endless

advancing

in the running wind

and then the days of gale and typhoon

then the still

burning calms    The "hot and copper sky"

The mind moves   into the tropic sea

which is the sea of idea   concepts

the shaping spirit  
moving in the currents  
of language   dream   and thought   to find out  
at last           reality

But still there is the sea itself

"When gliding by the Bashee isles we emerged at last upon  
the great South Sea..."

the Mariner's nightmare,  
its sinister whisper:

"Consider the subtleness of the sea;  
how its most dreaded creatures glide  
underwater...treacherously hidden  
beneath the loveliest tints of  
azure...Consider...the  
universal cannibalism of the sea...."

And the dream, the visionary circles of his friend:

"...not only do they believe that the stars are isles,  
But that far beyond all visible  
horizons, their own mild,

uncontinented seas interflow with  
the blue heavens; and so form the  
white breakers of the milky way."

Although he had not yet had glimpse of the terrifying god  
the actual, unfathomable reality

The waves act on each other they pile up  
uncountable acts which then  
disrupt themselves in surf and rocky shallows  
or dissipate in foam and weeds slopped on the sand  
in a day the weeds are rank  
then dried stiffened and caked

In this way therefore  
the sea becomes the beach gradually

I went along the beach that day  
looking for a fragment of the sea

But in the bright sun  
radiance was scattered all before me

-- the sea of sparkling light  
each grain of sand, diamond --

Looked out on troughs of diamonds

waves of opal light    impossible to look at

Burning

infinitesimal        light and time

And then this flowed away

a wave had washed it back into the sea

the sea was water once again    an infinite blue field

burning in the energy of noon

The clarity of space this afternoon

as all of sunlight fills the summer's world

the light impalpable    without substance

pure and clear

now designates the realms of space

apparent to the eye

the vast geometries of light

transparent    half-perceived

and changing in the processes of day

as I walk here just at this very time

luminous time

and burning luminous space

space of all spaces

inclusive    creating more

active living space    empty    and holy emptiness

creating allowing forgetting

the sun now gently warm upon my shoulder  
the bright blue sky  
the luminous white clouds slowly passing

And light is now a virtual part of thought

a plenitude of life the activity in which  
one lives and breathes and moves about

a plenitude of being and nonetheless fluidity

changing  
and a part of this free and open space

It is a kind of ambience empowerment  
each breath each step

an energy dispersing  
regathering to itself

articulating time  
moving forms implicit in the day  
these forms through which I move  
beginning the expression of this change

Living Time

in this actual light and space

Luminous day transcendent therefore

Infinite

And radiant space time

Fleeting recurring   endless   uncontained

full of powers   seen   unknown

And this is the actual plum

it is not a metaphor  
here there are no metaphors

it is not the sexual plum  
or an emblem for the body's hidden life

It is the plum itself

but yet it draws the eye   the hand  
and finally the mind

I become myself in tasting it

and it remains itself  
exposed   ripped open   though it is  
for it always is concealed nonetheless

like the body's hidden life  
Concealment is the essence of the flesh

without that there can be no life  
and yet it must be known   however deep it hides

without that   likewise   there can be no life

I sit beneath the tree   the noon is quiet, warm

the wind sound in the leaves the only sound  
the shadows keep me from the July sun

Nonetheless  
I bite and draw the juice out of this plum

a juice that is spiked with heady dreams

Now seven o'clock in the evening and late August

the day is falling  
and the sunset is red-orange aslant

the cornfield

The cornfield ripples and foams  
in the evening wind

how subtly it is never still  
The perceptible heat of sunset burns my face

the roadside grass is tinted  
and full of small shadows

At times  
I have to turn away when the field blurs  
in the strong light

near-blindness before the glare

And in the sunset's orange tint  
the green stalks of the corn  
are lacquered emerald

the blond corn silk glows a copper-gold

The wind blows on the field

like a fire billowing

I feel its waves of heat

Then shadows rippling through the corn  
are its waves passing  
radiated from the sun  
out through the waves of cornstalks

Suddenly

A bird rises from the field

against the sun  
it loses outline and is gone

a flake of ash

Bursting from a furnace    blown

from a fire    aloft

Fluttering    incandescent

and melting in the air

What will the cornfield be

Without fire  
beneath the nacre of the moon?

That night I went out by myself

Let myself out the back door

quietly    so as not to wake the others still asleep

I eased the screen door shut  
and stepped out on the dark back porch steps

The chill and damp night air    cold September

sweet and clear

I breathed up toward the sky

my breath a windowpane

of smoke    I was like  
an icicle in spring thaw

The back porch steps were slippery with hoar-frost  
and the grass was white with icy dew

walking through    it wet my shoes

my feet were chilled

and gradually my toes stung with the cold  
I went out through the back yard    moving across the lot  
the moon above me as I went

The moon was full and white

And shining on the silent road  
and on the dark hills and black fields

Here everything was silent    the night completely still  
My footsteps were so loud with the crunch and rasp of  
gravel

A loose stone kicked from underfoot  
shot like a tiddlywink

across the road  
bounced and clinked  
with a sound like a dropped coin

The autumn moon shone down  
fluorescent white and silvery white  
and ringing in the silence

Like a bell

In the moonlight the cornfield was black stubble

charred sticks in rows    cinders of a fire

A field of charcoal    complex ashes  
burned looking plowed earth

with the moon above

Over all the blue moonlight  
I lay down in the grass  
the cold wet soaked my back and then

I felt its cold seep into me  
I wiped my hands on the thick grass  
and rubbed the icy water on my face

freezing myself out of my life

I lay a while there    looking up at stars

that slowly turned

in a region of darkness  
The earth seemed gradually to drift

At moments I felt that I was staring up  
at scattered sparks of light moving like a dance  
become geometry  
the fabled music that one reads about

--And yet I heard it faintly --

and then became dance again endlessly

I felt the earth as a single thing beneath me  
both large and small  
unlimited and finite  
full of powers and yet desolate

known and unknown always

The sun at noon it is intolerably bright

I walk outside Where is the fire?

there must be fire somewhere for this heat

But no  
It was the end of summer

and cicadas simmer in the field which is burning itself out

And on the road every particle of sand  
is like a particle of light so many particles of light

I am so fearfully made

What must it be my hand against the sun X-rayed?

I almost see the bones

just as soldiers did at the Bikini atoll blast

Not the infinite

but the intricate is fear itself

And hatred is a very complex thing

love is always simple but hatred

is infinitely intricate and

The labyrinth of beauty leads one

Finally

To oneself again Becomes oneself again

None may him hide

from death hollow-eyed

Nor from sickness either

his twin brother

The rain came down

repeatedly today

rainy rainy day

Each time it fell

with a heavy drumming sound on the roof

It flooded every gutter  
the street itself flowed with gray steams

with a white mist  
sometimes with torn-down leaves

there was a kind of frying sound in the gutters

in the air something was getting huge and intent

And yet the street itself gets washed right out  
all gets carried in the currents of the rain

Today we stayed indoors  
to keep out of the downpour  
stayed in these dark rooms  
we rent with what we have

Our life our only life

I drifted in the night  
thinking of the rain  
I did not sleep

in the streaming of the night

I had slept before

and lay there drifting through my own absence  
from myself not self yet still self

unmotivated unreflected impartial coming to all

I lay there hidden still unconscious  
and my breath was only the slightest stirring

Turning in my sleep amid the sources  
bathed in the currents of original sleep

Moving through that place  
waxing and waning  
in the recurring tide silence in the turning

the absence the blank attunement  
Shadows over shadows that was what I was

In this way I dreamed of stillness

in this way I was incarnate peace

The darkness lightened moment by moment

Though as yet I knew no time but lay in that half-dark

Timeless

a nascent and still obscured intelligence

and in that place of twilight  
I was as yet an insubstantial being  
and without circumstance of self or knowledge

action or activity

And at this early hour one bead of rain --  
     depending from the tip of leaf or icy blade of grass  
 not yet made glitter in the sun  
 as a trembling and crystalline drop  
         the virtual diamond that must belie  
     its utmost fragility  
 has only grey twilight now, the world half-lit

Resurgence gradually comes into me  
but only since I had conceived it first

Had dreamed my resurrection  
in the darkness  
like a seed in soil  
So that the green shoots budding in the dark

Move upward arching through the flesh  
And break in white blossoms  
flowers of the mind  
My many words like petals of incarnate speech

And likewise sunrise gradually erupts  
the slantwise corridors of violet and red are tinting  
everything  
The orange and yellow breaking up the ground in which I  
lay

And darkness   silence   stillness  
are disrupted in points of new activity

the paper foldings of the paper world unfold  
realness comes forth

dimensions breathe

I come forth from my sleep and walk out in the  
orange obscurity of dawn

I not I myself non-self yet still self

I walk out on the grass still cold and wet and I'm  
still cold and wet

And on one side the sun shines on me as I walk along

Awake now and move in the present moment  
the light says this to me

I must attend to it alone

There can be no falling off from strength if you do that  
powers

powers  
powers these alone are good

conserve touch sources elusive  
yet available

Move in the current time

the present place  
among the powers that gather to this moment

the grass blades

sparkling from the rain

Where is death then? What is it to you now?

But which and how many? metaphors  
can keep you in the present  
the poise of passing knowledge  
the beauty of unhesitating grace?

So many doors that block reality  
so many keys to open them

For birth and death must always be dreamed first

And having had the dream  
now lay hold to the world through action and activity

And so I know of access to another life  
as though I had become deeply willing to believe in it

And so likewise you know another life

I want pure contact but not with any substance or with  
any body

I want experience itself but no image of it

To think of neither life nor death but to participate in  
this intensity and be  
the moving center of these transformations

These transformations that I cannot name but yet suggest

And the intensity which also has no name and can't be  
known

except by being touched   possessed

heard and seen and felt

## **BOOK TWO: POSSESSION**

## POSSESSION

### I

Choruses of the dead come to me as I sleep, they speak  
and I hear them

Spectral loves, heavenly loves, solar spirits, angels  
moving, mingling, intertwining, separating

I hear them and I rise from sleep, no longer in my bed  
but in a place of darkness nonetheless

And the fallen move around me in their dance together,  
turning in their morris of darkness

But how did I come here? By what door did I have  
entrance?

## II

The room was darkened, shadows cut across the bed and  
dresser and the chair, and at the corner of the blinds  
there was a mitered crease of light

We were among the shadows on the bed, we lay there  
quietly together

And she had fallen into a dream, although not totally  
asleep, on her face the slightest smile, a rapt and  
attentive expression, she was possessed by what I  
could not know

Though I could sense the stir of half-lit consciousness  
as yet not sunk too far from where it played across  
her face, across closed eyes

Like still dark water that betrays not one trace of the  
movement deep beneath which yet you know is  
there

In the shifting of an arm or leg, in the tremor of an  
eyelid, in the briefest shade of mood across her  
brow

I felt the trace of quick intelligence and intricate desire,  
the opening and turning of some movement  
harbored there

My breath did not cloud the glass of her skin, I left no  
fingerprint

But my whole body listened, I was an open ear placed to  
the thin reverberating wall which was her form

### III

This moment, now so full of light, flows, it is a wave  
An impetuous energy burning us together --

We are apart from all without --

Day incandescent at the window  
The million atoms of sunlight  
Showering abundant radiance through burning space  
without measure

But that is all outside, for here there is  
just our involving space

Creating stillness turning on the drifting point of rapt  
Attention

To one face, to this one Other

In this augmented peace  
Deepening to an inward and burgeoning excitement --

Knotted and unknotted --

And opening at last  
its petals of white foam

Its oracles of light in the hearkening ear --

Time dissolves,  
is just a breath  
between our lips --

Our bodies borne and turning  
on the moment's crest

Burning through this transfixed hour  
On the becalmed incandescence  
the light contained within these walls

Within our now discovered bodies  
Naked and ardent in their own true fire

In the turning of a moment  
We have turned to face each other  
to serve one deep intent

But desire being infinite  
we have to turn again

In this space left here, however,  
When we lie at rest, adrift in a temporary peace

I cannot help but wonder at your beauty

So, baffled, and obscurely moved by this –  
For better or for worse  
I start to speak again

You listen as I speak into the dust mote teaming light

#### IV

The summer evening burning down, the field darkening to  
sunset  
The grass a luminous orange-rust in slanting light

I stood by the twisted barbed wire fence  
And watched the sun burning itself out  
And felt the advancing quiet  
That gradually became the sounds of night

I heard the birds from the edge of the nearly dark wood  
And in the field-side marsh the bull frogs thrummed  
With a sound like rubber bands

Every now and then a light breeze blew and tapped  
the leaves  
I thought of other summers, of a line  
Of summers reaching forward, another reaching back  
From where I stood, meditating  
Playing with the images of time  
Some way off, the brushy tops of the grass  
Had a faint amber glow, a scattering of embers reflecting  
the sun's warmth

Step by step the shadows deepened, spread  
And everything was night

The nearest trees  
Were a coast of dense blackness against the deep blue  
of the sky  
The field a vague area not really visible

White points of stars drifted through the night sky

And then, after a while, the breeze picked up  
And brought the sweet scent of damp earth  
feel of chill grass  
And a hint of the cool night coming on

I breathed it in, that beautiful and partially disturbing scent  
Standing in the wood side darkness hearing

The stir, the whisper of the trees  
The being and strange activity of summer night

## V

It was earlier in the evening, I had walked  
The wooded slopes that border on the field  
It was the early part of sunset  
The light came through the leaves in sparks and flashes  
Struck down its dusty spotlights here and there  
Where filaments of bright floss floated in the rays

I kept on walking, moving through the trees  
The light was blinking -- now, now, now --  
Through openings in the trees' green leaves,  
Leaf covering leaf blotting the straight sun

And in the overhang of leaves there was  
A translucent green and yellow green, luminous,  
Suffused with yellow haloes and splotted  
With darker shoals, leaf shades and branch  
silhouettes and limb shadows



Leaves that catch the sun  
And funnel it to earth  
The tributaries of the light  
Drawn like rain into the ground

From the center of the sun and the flash-bulb  
After-image which the sun is

And the countless geometries clamorous with light

Space takes root it is  
A thousand branches  
burning

in inextinguishable fires

The light is flakes of incandescence flames  
Which are the leaves

See

they fall in the flare of mirror shards

Or in the glittering activity of waves

In the light and space unlimited of the afternoon

They fall without end  
This burning

burning  
burning  
has no end

Earth streams in the sunny February thaw  
It steams in the cold of early March  
Just starting to awaken  
to smolder with spring heat

The waterfall steams  
a continuous nimbus

Of water and vapor and light

Ice steams in the sun  
and becomes water

Earth steams in the sun  
and turns to mud

And mud steams  
and is both earth and water

So that

Earth and water become fire in the air of spring

## VII

Now the season's fall, not summer and not spring

October's sun was gold upon the wooden floor

We lay together there, just waking from  
Our unexpected sleep to find the day --

The choruses of light came to me as I slept  
Singing chanting whispering

radiating light and cold

And warmth came into me

And there were voices in my ear

The sound of this light  
Woke me to a deeper depth of calm

A clarity like sleep suffused with knowledge  
Though still I slept

And in my dream you came to me

Now newly present you are this body of living warmth  
This perfect light one cannot see but only feel

I feel it on my face, I know it in my mind  
It reaches to my heart, a light

Not of the surface of the skin, but felt and known  
In those dimensions of luminous grace

Which you possess within and so create around you,  
Like a sheer white curtain which dilates in warm breeze

All light is present in those realms of coloration  
That your skin possesses when I study it

A light which is your body's warmth  
And seems to draw my eye at last, to lead it on

To lead it deeper in, as one suggestion  
Of glimpsed presence disappears, disperses

Denies itself behind emerging depths of warmth  
Of opal and of rose and luminous tan

I would go deeper still, but I am always stopped  
The ritual always dissipates at last

For if this seeing is desire, desire  
Is a tide which too must ebb, recede

Into the unlit depths and waters of the unlit world

My eye awoke to just the blank white sheet

Its mountainous crumples, wrinkles, creases  
Rough against my cheek, just barely warm on your side

And with the faded perfume of your body

But you were gone

## VIII

I lay beside you listening as you slept  
My body, my entire being but an ear

I listened where the sea rushed  
In its choruses of waves

Its million voices hurrying, going nowhere  
In that silence my ear a smaller shell

Placed to that breathing and reverberant wall --  
How could it take in all, where time

Itself flowed in the currents  
Of your blood, incarnate time

My ear itself a shell, auricular  
Eddy whorl of time

Against the slight shell of your body  
Which is itself an echo of some other time

I listened to the echoing of worlds  
The hollow rushing sound within the night's dark  
space

It was like distant water moving or the small voice  
Of the sea, which is not really there

The sound grown faint and nearly lost, so far away  
Recessed so deep within, distant

And yet gradually more clear  
What was it that I heard or did not hear

But felt at first, only in my mind?  
A stirring in the darkness

Of approaching sleep, moving gradually  
In tension newly animate, excitement now  
awakening

And gathering in the body -- desire  
It was desire for your beauty, for your soul, for you

And so through this erotic door I entered  
By the rose lips of the shell

And the sources opened and I moved through them

## IX

I woke in darkness in an airless space  
In which I couldn't stand, nor sit upright  
Nor turn onto my side, nor move at all

Some weight had pinned me like a moth to board  
But covered in deep earth, entangled roots  
Enwrapped and gripped my legs and held them dead

There was a hand upon my face that smothered me  
As with an ether cloth you can't push off  
Forcing nauseating giddiness and dreams

On you, and in the dream I had I shouted --  
Loud, but could not shout myself awake  
For I was trapped, immovable weight of earth

Upon my chest, on my face, pressing down  
At length I ceased, and then the dream ceased too  
And I awoke, but to that same dark place

But after some vague length of time, when I  
Had given up all efforts to get free,  
All thought or movement, all desire or will

The bottom of that airless closet space  
Turned into rotted wood and crumbling dirt  
And broke up under me like thawing ice

And I fell through into what seemed a well  
Or like an endless elevator shaft,  
Though narrow, and then narrowing some more

Until the walls closed in and scraped my sides --  
My arms, my face and legs, my back --  
There wasn't anything I could protect

But all was scraped and burned; it felt as though  
A thousand wire brushes scoured me,  
And then a thousand tingling points of fire

I tried to shout once more or swear out loud  
Against whatever dragged me back this way,  
For now I knew that I was being dragged

Or hauled backward or sucked in through a tube  
And yet I still was falling fast, so fast --  
A backward plunge although no longer down --

Directionless -- which gradually became  
A sort of turning, drifting, near stasis  
Suspended in an area of cold --

A sudden blankness, freezing, ultraviolet  
In which I tumbled like an astronaut  
Slowly -- weightless, calm -- and then I saw:

My skin had been abraded, my flesh ripped off  
Was drizzling away in gouts and clots  
Of blood and crimson streams and particles

I watched it gradually disintegrate  
Just as a drop of ink in water breaks  
Apart then spreads, dispersing in small dots

And smears and faintest veils and then is gone,  
So did my flesh break up, my blood dissolve  
In veils fainter and then fainter still

Until the final veil of the flesh  
At length was rendered totally transparent --  
Burning, non-existent, and I stepped through

How can I begin to tell what this was like?  
Neither of body nor of mind, neither  
An innate impetus and power which

I'd held within the body I had had  
Now moved diminished in its warmth and scope,  
No longer implicated in external space

No longer moving in the realm of time  
Yet clarified by virtue of simplicity  
And made in this obscurely more intense

Then everything began to move at once  
No longer soil, clods of dirt or stones  
But thick mud, black as coffee grounds and cold

It was the medium through which I moved  
I was a swimmer in an unlit sea  
Which gradually became a viscous oil

The color of black ink, but like molasses  
It poured gradually, though I could feel  
It building up a current as it went

It flowed with a stronger pull, but faster  
Drawing me in a graduated arc  
Around and around more and faster still

The dense blackness thinned out by degrees  
An inexplicable and seeping warmth --  
That came from nowhere like a sudden flush

Then seemed to permeate and break it up  
Like turpentine dissolving oil paint  
Until it was just water, starred water

With dark elements floating here and there  
Like curdles in bad milk or bits of wood  
Or rafts of seaweed in the midnight sea

The current bore me in a faster arc  
Which steadily increased, and I was like  
A cork afloat upon strange water now

Full of green lights, cat's eye phosphorescence  
Now changing, transforming to a deep violet  
Like dawn coming slowly to the sky

A green translucent theatre of light  
Arched like a dome of green ice over me  
And in the center straight up over me

A small grey sun shone smaller than the moon  
Smaller than a dime, an ashen grey  
And smudged with black, like a burnt out light bulb

I scooped a handful of the water up  
It too was green, no longer streaming red  
But crystalline transparent green shot through

With points of fire and flecks of colored light  
Like the spirituous light inside a diamond  
Or the prisms in the iris of the eye

I noticed that a few drops in my hand  
Held bright yellow flecks like pollen grains  
But when I looked into that remote world

Framed by the giant basin of my palm  
I saw a million protozoan forms,  
Animals of delicate translucent shape

White, intricate and gauzy, like figures  
Cut in fine glass, luminous, unclouded  
And with a strange light source behind their skin

They drifted in their own realm, I in mine  
I watched through panes of lucid water  
As through the lenses of a microscope

And when I looked more closely I could see  
The protozoan forms I had observed  
Were really parts of bodies, fetus-size

White arms and legs -- tiny -- filled with light  
And every now and then a whole fetus,  
The living phosphorescence of the sea

A kind of glowing plankton all around,  
The water filled with sparks and flakes of light  
Like radium-glowing dials, numbers

So many lights obscured those greenish depths  
I gazed into the levels of darkness  
Lit by a yellow light from deep within

X

I found myself in a dark place which yet was not my grave  
And I was asked,

Of all you might desire, what do you desire most, what do  
you desire now?

And I, though changed in the sublime non-being of the  
dead remembered everything I might have had

Of all things women's beauty was most beautiful, the form  
of woman and their loveliness

Her face, her hair and her lingering perfume, her grace of  
movement like a curtain swaying in warm breeze

Her presence felt as one feels some incomparable joy

Bring me the beauty of those women whom I loved, I said,  
and of those I wanted and of those I only saw

There was not anything that I could want more than that  
shapely loveliness and light made palpable in them  
and which I felt within me in their presence

And when they came they were not many different women  
and yet they were not one

A living presence filled the confines of the room: a  
single voice yet multiple which altered  
consciousness, became my thought now splintered  
in a million points infinitely divisible, a thousand  
mirrors cracked to show as many faces, which yet  
were all one face

Gradually this went away

Then I was asked, Of all you might desire, what do you  
desire secondly?

And I, haltingly as though puzzling out a language I could  
barely read, remembered everything I once had  
known

Of all things artistry was most my love, most lastingly the  
force and the significance of life

Bring me the essence of all art, I said, bring me the genius  
of apt grace, the animate intelligence of eye and  
hand, of ear and eye, of body and of mind

But such a wish was vain and futile as I found when no one  
answered me and nothing came from my request but  
silence

And gradually this went away

And I was asked, Of all you might desire, what do you  
desire finally?

And I, having by now lost interest in all else, imagined  
some pure origin of beauty. All beauty whether of  
body or of mind must have its source in light, its  
warrant and its final end

Bring me the light itself, I said, not what it shows or  
bright things that reflect and not light's origin, but  
light itself

I imagine a realm where there is only light

## XI

The choruses of light drew near to me  
I heard them whispering, a sound  
Like paper burning, the intensity

Was such I kept my face turned to the ground  
And could not look into that circling of fire  
But felt impaired, and limited, and bound

And as I listened to the burning choir  
The outer husk of consciousness was burned  
Entirely away like paper in a fire

Freed of such constraint it was returned  
To that originality one might surmise  
As prior to all thinking, thought unlearned

Pure mind emancipated from the ties  
Of trivial concepts and of trivial men,  
So that my open eyes were opened eyes

I find it hard to say what I knew then  
And far above my head a glaring aura  
Shifted, in the midst of this a sun

Glowed tiny, clear -- at least I thought I saw  
A distant watery dazzle of sunlight  
Glittering like wet ice in a bright thaw

And then the liquid glimmer turned to white,  
Divided into petals made of snow,  
A flower formed of snow and which despite

Its petals falling just as snowflakes do  
Continually regained what it had lost,  
Its petals always falling, yet still new

I tried then to discern what I still most  
Desired to see -- light's body, light's essence  
Which still I wanted at whatever cost

For what, I thought, was light itself but sense  
Epitomized? And sense could not exist  
But in some form which gave it some substance

Yet light as such could only be expressed  
As light, which being perfect sense itself  
Could only in as perfect form be dressed

Therefore light's body is light's very self,  
Its essence and its soul, under the specie  
Of appearance and on the truth's behalf

A grace, and yet clear objectivity, these  
Indicate, and yet cannot define,  
The lucid mystery by which one sees

O image of all beauty and insight  
Model of understanding and delight  
What could be clearer than your clarity, Light?

And so why was it that I saw no sign  
Of what I'd hoped to see? The white rose too  
Was gone and there was nothing to be seen

## XII

Then in my dream I lay flat on my back  
The song a flickering and distant light  
Grew to an opening apprehension

A sun at the dark root of my brain that rose  
Into a dawning consciousness of light  
The dark behind my eyes dispersed in light

And I awoke to greater consciousness  
More than what any dawn brought when I lay  
In white sheets, in the chrysalis of flesh

For in the region of the dead I saw  
With greater clarity, with an eye untouched  
By love, desire, not even touched by fear

But equanimity and clairvoyance  
These were my part, such as befits a shade  
I lay there and a voice was in my ear

The forms around me which before had been  
Empty, opaque, and resonant darkness  
Present, and yet totally spectral

Now radiated light from deep inside  
Like coals that hold a glowing heat  
Beneath a thin grey powdery ash film

Out of the light they seemed to veil or guard  
And which I knew was just the outer haze  
Of some deeper and less tolerable source

A voice came which I recognized as song  
Translated to a different mode, not words  
Exactly, but music so expressive

Of deeply buried feeling that it seemed  
Articulate of thought and grew into  
A clarity more clear than any word

Which nonetheless I understood as words  
Spoken from recesses of that light  
And imparting its obscure significance

I heard the influence of cold and light  
The confluence of voices gathering  
Alchemical vibrations to a pool

Of energy which flowed around my form  
Embowered in the shell of comprehending peace,  
Oblivious to darkness and irrelevance

I felt and knew the nature of the real,  
Of light, and time, of movement and of space,  
Of action and activity and death

I heard, 'The moment of the world is energy  
Exfoliating throughout light and space  
And time, all multiplying in new worlds

Of light and space and time, of substance, force  
And movement, of mind and images –  
A match flare in the darkness scatters worlds,

As possibilities diverge from fact,  
Divide and ramify like forking paths  
In realms of night still left unvisited

By thought, though present enigmatically  
In every atom of the stirring dark  
And sensed obscurely, with obscure disquiet

From time to time -- the world is many worlds,  
Is many voices in the eddy-whorl  
Of self and time which is your hearing mind

And are they really there? Why do you ask?  
What does it seem to be? The day is really there,  
Powerful with the movement of light's forms

There's no enigma greater than the fact  
Of that bright sea, a calm and visible power,  
Its infinite potential realized

Instant by instant and point by point  
And yet still held eternally in reserve,  
Touching all things and yet itself untouched

If light, which is the simplest of all things,  
Original of things, most candid thing,  
Takes many forms and some of them obscure

Or baffling like Rothko's floating planes  
Why should not later apparitions be  
More complex and still less accessible

Though less mysterious than this one first thing?  
The world is many worlds, some possess light  
And some have darkened to invisibility

Reality is planes like planes of light  
And shadow, moving planes which intersect,  
Adjoin, face off, through points of space and time

Dimensions interpenetrate like folds  
Which form the petals of a rose  
Vibrations implicated like the plies

Inside a rose -- discontinuous, attuned,  
Touching at times and not at other times,  
Related yet not perfectly aligned

Always ajar somehow, somewhat, with gaps  
When meaning seems to fall awry,  
Pattern dispersing into random points --

Like fireflies, their fluid constellations  
Never seen with certainty, revealed  
And dissolved at once against the dark

The quiet summer night, which covers up  
Each trace, though somehow it had sponsored it  
And brought it forth, however passively,

The endless depthless background always there  
Which their brief lights occur against --  
Night, created, uncreated, creating

And uncreating space -- the fireflies  
Which lead the eye to find progressive depths  
Of night, dimensions unfolding in the field

In vagrant regions, haunted geometries,  
Yet all dissolve no sooner than they're seen  
Into the darkness which we see them by

The rationale of sight creates its own  
Dark worlds of light, the visible  
A medium like water, or like paint

Or night itself, before the searching eye,  
The energy of seeing meeting thus  
The energy of nature – color, forms,

And breaking waves of near-geometry  
Which move, clash, coalesce, disintegrate  
And are the trace of energies, furies --

Of eye and brain, of body and of mind,  
Amid the nearly overwhelming fate  
Of life in contact inescapably

With light, time, earth, air, and weather -- all circumstance  
In this way seeing is a power, a force,  
As much as any other in the world

Since it becomes a door, of many doors,  
Through which one passes, moving from one plane  
Of the enigma to another plane

And likewise hearing is a power as well  
The tale of time is whispered in your ear  
You move, dance, to that melody, though all

You hear is noise, the stupefying clangor  
Deafens you -- obnoxious business of the world,  
To deaden and impair and finally kill

And yet the world is poured in at your ear,  
You are the whirlpool where it spins resolved  
Into the quiet medium of thought

In this way, gently, you control the world,  
By listening the opening to mind  
To sense its actual vibration there

And not the spurious disphoric hum  
And static but its underlying breath  
And pause time's unacknowledged character

By listening you know your own breathing  
And feel the movement of your thought  
You plumb the well that is each word, the echoes

Of the word within the listening mind  
Stirring the memory of other words  
And fragments of your superseded lives

By vestiges like doors onto the past  
Through which a long-dormant reality  
Floods into you, a breeze that rises from

The sunlit and abandoned rock garden  
Now glittering with inescapably clear  
Significance which now becomes a part

Of you, yet only by allowing it  
Crediting its impulse to be actual

To listen thus is opening the real  
To life and thought and thought likewise to it,  
The real a fragrance in the air of time

And like a scent that alters consciousness  
Until that is a flower itself, although  
Your head is just a hollow dried seed pod

Yet it becomes a flower, and your life  
Unfolds its green leaves, lives in unfolding  
Until at length it dries and blows away

Yet even so perhaps it still persists  
In realms of memory, the memory  
Of those still left or of society itself

And therefore listening must open to  
What is not real, to the virtual  
Whose impulse to be real you must intuit

And you yourself are half illusion -- air,  
Your life is lighter than the blown milkweed  
It floats, catches the light like intricate dust,

Less stable than the dust itself, no more than air  
And yet for you it's all completely real  
And heavier than lead – dead, dense and dull

What can release you from these boundaries?  
Listening is all, the most moral sense,  
And music the consummation of listening

Music of all things is the most like life  
True music is its emanated breath  
Everything real, compelling your respect

As something genuine in human life  
Creates its own time in that measured world  
Genuine music is the form of life

Where mind and body unify and breath  
Itself involving the remotest cells  
Groups feeling into periodic grace,

Which gathering the energy of words  
Without the words articulates felt thought  
And sounds the silent image of the mind,

Creates a vibrant and illusory presence  
Whose rhythm shapes a virtual body,  
Which is likewise a pure apparent mind

Created in the world of time, presence  
Called forth entirely from sound, a soul  
Of some kind, an illusory Subject --

Luminous with number, measured energy,  
Rational power and calculated breath,  
Living its consummation, never dead,

Completed yet not ended, always new  
However many times returning to  
Its source and motivating origin,

Neither of body nor of mind, yet both  
Conceive it and together bring it forth,  
And as it comes it draws them in its wake

Into a darker confluence of being,  
As mind and body interpenetrate  
Life then is water closing itself up

Divisions you had felt, all vexed duality,  
A ripple or a transitory script  
Traced upon water too substantially one

Seek for your life to have analogous  
Poise, a discipline like that, and strength,  
An independence from all alien

Disturbances, as music can't be touched  
By any noise however loud it be,  
No more than moonlight by loud neon signs

They are two different realms Attune yourself  
To one and put the other one aside  
You have to choose one, so choose listening

Music resolving all duality  
Is thus the highest mode of listening,  
A way of being in the world and time

This is the purpose of true knowledge, to guide,  
To know beyond dissension or contempt,  
Holding the world just lightly, though deeply

The world is elusive and ungraspable like water  
The task is to be balanced, buoyant, you  
Must give yourself up to it, yet reserve

An inner point of calm, like a match flame  
You keep within yourself, body and mind,  
As waves and eddies wash around your form

Yet you're accustomed to the medium,  
Its sovereign ever-present gentlest strength  
Of current and the consequence of this

Yet there, suspended and of course alone,  
You have to drift half intentionally toward grace  
And gather strength from what flows all around

You there: you will have balance then  
And certainty of self-integrity,  
Which is a style of managing process

And unforeseen events; for though you have  
The passages of sense and intellect  
And that deep complex sense, your life itself,

You move by steps in darkness, routes of night  
And currents of mysterious import  
Which intricately weight your concrete life,

Your body and mind -- sensuous and perplexing powers --  
Forcing and upsetting balances, so that  
Your life must constantly restore itself

Therefore treat all things with respect and tact  
Listening is crucial, feeling through every sense,  
For every sense must listen and then see

We bring the risen powers of the mind  
The risen senses of the body's life  
That now are like seeds planted in its soil

These growing, branching out in all sciences  
Are realizing consciousness throughout  
All realms of being, searching out the sun

A manifold yet single knowledge-tree  
Seeking with its swaying head and crown  
To catch that very close yet distant light

All doors will lead one to reality,  
For everything's a door -- you are yourself,  
Every part and faculty a door

The only question then is, will you step  
Across the minor threshold of yourself,  
Opening magic casements, dark windows

That when they're dark give only your own face  
Back to your gaze? So open them toward night  
To touch the dark and partially unknown

Realities not part of self-concern,  
Opening self-hood toward the actual  
As breathing opens to the world and balances

Inward involvement with accepting space,  
Purpose and secrecy and growth with mere  
Duration, placing its music there

You open the back porch window -- the night air  
Spills in with its cool dampness, with the scent  
Of elderberry and the mid-June grass

For that one instant night is just perfume  
Diffused in darkness, while the stars drift off  
Sparkling coldly through the maple's leaves

And at that moment you can't quite recall  
Which is the inside of the window -- night  
Has taken hold, as inside moves out toward

The dark realm which at any rate has flowed  
In through the screen you press your nose against,  
Its cold metallic veil against your lips

Deadens things a moment, though the stars  
Still drift, the cool breeze still stirs through the  
leaves,  
Dark and shimmering in the random gusts

### XIII

Then just outside the window, the dark tree  
(What kind is it?) was shaking all its leaves

And I awoke and found that night had come  
Thinking, I lay beside you in the bed. You slept,

And in the moonlight the tree's black shape  
Was fluttering and shaking on the floor,

And like a madwoman tossing her wild hair  
And thrashing in an epileptic fit

It writhed and twisted in the darkness there  
Yet never could escape from its night-world

Of twining serpents -- torn like an oracle,  
Tormented and ecstatic, intoxicated

With moonlight, its shadows interweaving  
Like writhing water snakes, black water,

Sinuously turning in their morris near  
The surface of the glimmering night pool --

A depthless, substanceless, a moonlit world  
Rising upon us as we fall toward sleep,

So that you seemed an image of deep peace,  
Of a dark and concrete breathing mystery --

Your body's life -- here tempered by completeness  
To a human dignity, the effortless

Completion of the body by incarnate mind,  
Hidden in its silence, yet of which each breath

Is but the physical echoing and musical  
Expression, though never a fulfillment --

Mind realized in body, body in mind,  
Awaiting the fulfillment of the day.

The shadows of the trees outside are ink  
Against the deep blue of the sky, and on

The moonlit floor the shadows of the trees  
Are ink spilled out, the moonlight like a dew.

And cool night air has dampened the window  
Left partly open to the chilly night.

Night air flows in, and yet we cannot mind  
Since we're at home in it. The floor is cold,

The night moves slowly and the stars drift round  
Like points of light along our walls.

And time is something totally benign.  
How beautiful time is! This is the time.

How -- with what startling clarity -- you are at peace  
Beside me here, your very life apparent,

Stunningly disclosed even while  
You lie here breathing quietly.

And even now I have the feeling that  
We've never been so subtly attuned --

I to you and you likewise to me. Although  
You neither look nor see, you seem

Yet to be subliminally aware,  
And in a sense to be deeply listening,

As though with your whole being.  
A cool and early autumn scent

Has come into the room,  
An essence in the clear night air.

You know all this, feel all in every breath,  
In this your hour of sleep here at my side,

A sweet scent like a grove, a token of the time  
We have together here, we two enclosed within

The space of our two solitudes now one,  
Here in the fragile pause of time, this hour.

How all things seem to tend toward us  
As we lie here in mutual and balanced peace,

You sleeping there, and I awake, and you  
More enigmatically awake than I,

I watching through the window the dark sky,  
The precise and many stars, the night's slowness,

While you attend to other patterns  
Hidden in the movement of your inner night

Where cosmos upon cosmos balances,  
The hidden stars and sun and moon your own.

My hand upon your hip is my contact  
With powers partially disclosed in sleep

And partially disclosed to waking thought,  
So that the two of us participate

In this completion and renewal of  
The music of our life continually renewed --

I by active thinking, passively,  
And you, though passive and asleep, active.

The sky alters to green and violet gradually,  
My shadow on the white sheet, very faint at first,

Darkens to a definite grey silhouette  
Against the plain white cotton tinted now

By twilight to a pallid lavender,  
Yet still the shadow is just a faint aura.

At dawn the stars fall one by one, as leaves  
Fall from a tree, as slowly, point by point,

The last faint embers in the cooling grate  
Go out and leave white ashes and a few charred  
sticks.

## XIV

I looked and saw the day had come, the earth  
Lay open to the light, the hillside grass  
Was dark green in the early morning sun,  
The air was cool and damp from late-night rain  
And treetops dipped and wavered in the breeze.  
The shadow of each fence post round the yard  
Was black and more than double the post's length,  
Wet grass flashed and sparkled in the light  
And orange sunlight glittered from between dark  
leaves.

On the hill the grass was still wet from the rain,  
Catching sun-flashes in the roadside ditch;  
The chicory and clover and brown thistles  
Held bright water drops that fell or splattered off  
When the leaves were shaken in the gusting breeze.

The puddles in the veins of sandy mud  
Reflected the light purple of the sky  
At sunrise -- blue bars of clouds spread high  
In early morning wind and cold and lit  
At their high altitude with bright pink light.

I slipped out from the bed, took my clothes  
From the chair and then went downstairs.

The downstairs room was full of morning light,  
Sunrise streaming through the window's glass,  
A beautiful unearthly light -- pink-orange,  
Unlimited and filling the whole room.  
The polish of the table, the oak floor --  
All caught sharp bits of light.

I turned away and walked out toward the back  
And stepped out on the porch -- the wooden steps  
Were slippery with icy dew. And though  
The backyard faces west and so couldn't  
Catch all the sun as yet, the day was there.  
The morning light was rising like a mist  
Out of the garden's not yet frozen soil,  
The frost a prism web along the grass,  
And near the field, past the wire fence  
A ground fog lingered like an icy smoke.

Light gathered and condensed, became a mist  
Upon the green of saplings and grape vines  
That tangled in crazed knots, on tall brush grass  
Illuminated in the slanted light  
And on tall burdock, full of black shadows  
In the red-orange glare, and the browned milkweed.

Now things stood out with clarity: green leaves  
And amber plumes of goldenrod, and creeper vines,  
The light an active presence, changing dusk to dawn,  
And through the leaves still shining with wet  
The sun fell on the tree crowns and high boughs  
Brightening an area -- a rippling  
Of daylight and reflected shine on leaves.  
And all the while the wind had blown steadily,  
Clattering the leaves that swayed and tossed  
And agitating the treetops now lightly grey.

The sun they catch is brighter now, straight on,  
Is getting higher and the light  
Is metal filaments among the leaves,  
Bright webs like spider silk  
Among the brightening and moving boughs.

Yet even as the day comes one can feel  
The pure sufficient power of this moment now  
Just as light touches every ice crystal  
Or white grass blade or curled leaf  
Beaded with the melted frost,  
Before the presence of the noon, albeit  
Autumn's noon warm with gold light, mild air  
That has a scent like warm champagne  
From half fermented apples on the ground,  
The still charged air in autumn light  
With wasps hovering through the afternoon,  
Before all this -- the feeling of a pause,  
Of forces poised; how clearly one can sense this.

I break a sprig of dark green basil leaf  
Now a cigar-like brown or khaki green  
Curled and tea-splotched with frost, so crisp  
It dryly flakes away in dust and bits.  
I roll it in my hand till nothing's left  
Except the spine and a sweet basil scent  
That lingers on my hand like old perfume,  
A token of the life of summer  
Left here like a memory and seed,  
The garden's old sachet and potpourri --  
Tomato leaf and withered pepper plant  
And crumpled basil, and the dry dark mint,  
The stiff and dried-out leaves, vines like straw,  
Soft rattling seed pods, pinto-splotched,  
Tapping the wood stake, the dried, yellowed,  
Scrolled-up leaves the color of old parchment,

No longer broad and green to catch the sun  
Or sticking to my shirt back as I crouched  
At work beneath their shadow canopy.

And yet this present moment is not less  
Than any summer's day. I live in time  
And must incorporate this memory,  
Balance it, complete it, live it out,  
As summer likewise gathered up the spring  
And brought it to completion, realized  
And superseded in its hot still days.

So every moment of our life in time  
Must have its origin in memory.  
Each atom of the light and air right now  
Is like a seed adrift which must take root  
So that it might bring forth evolving worlds.

I walk back through the side yard littered  
With fallen plums that lie in the wet grass  
And nearly slip on one I squash beneath  
My shoe, and lose my balance in its muck  
That smears beneath me, treacherous as grease.  
The sweet ferment of rotting fills the air  
As I pass through the circle of windfalls.  
The icy dew has melted on the back porch steps  
And left small puddles and bright water beads.  
The light is clearer in the kitchen where the sun  
Shines on the clock above the stove -- it's eight.

The house no longer shifts or settles,  
Nor does the stair I climb give any creak  
Or crack beneath my step, but everything  
Is clear, confirmed, solid in morning light.  
The blond oak floor gleams back the morning sun

And the white wainscot is the equivalent of light,  
Clean and sober paint shining. The old door  
Opens softly as I step back in and see  
That you're awake yourself and getting up.  
The curtains are still drawn, though the shade  
Breathes outward with fresh gusts of air, the sun  
Is like bright glass shards on the window frame,  
The floor's no longer damp with night-time damp,  
Although the window sill is wet: I close  
The window against the draft then open up  
The curtains and the day comes fully in.

## XV

Three things combine to balance us in the movement of our  
life: the stillness and activity of mind, its utopia  
of calm and luminous motion.

For light at length is born within the mind and makes its  
own realm there, its own life and activity, as the  
Word created space from less than space.

Then, secondly, the beauty of the time and place when light  
on anything creates the world anew and leads one  
by the beauty of such light beyond language.

The third thing is our body and the earth itself, the  
touchstone of all sanity, the place of life and theatre  
of education played out for one glimpse, one  
recognition, of the real.

It asks of you one question: Will you know the real once, at  
least, in your brief lifetime?

For the world is always other than it seems.

Then think of only highest things.

For the ages of illusion end; the time of all such things  
must end.

And the ages of hatred end as well. The time of all such  
things must pass away.

I imagine a time when there will be just light.

To hold to neither life nor death, neither;  
To be confined to neither concrete nor to virtual,  
But to participate in their intensity  
And be the moving center of their transformations,  
In balance, buoyancy in the process of the living world  
Which always, finally, is light.

For the light is either born here or, imprisoned, reigns  
here in freedom.



# **BOOK THREE: TENEBRAE**

## TENEBRAE

### I

*In darkness I lay down*

The night was empty, freezing in the cold room  
All around me, over me, within me  
And silence over the entire town,  
For it was winter and the town lay under ice,  
Outside the snow was sparkling on the ground,  
The roofs were laden with a weight of snow  
And ice, old ice now stained a dirty brown  
Hung in stalactites from the house's eaves  
And from the undersides of cars.  
Far off the river shrunk beneath the ice  
Flowed in its frozen death,  
The temperature was twenty-five below  
And every taken breath  
Went up in white smoke to the winter stars.

I lay there thinking in the empty room  
And listened to its ticking silence  
Echoing the toys of thought  
That occupied my mind with their small sound.  
It was not just the absence  
Of every sound except the clock's,  
The deprivation of that room  
So dark and so completely still  
Was like a deprivation of all active sense,  
Annihilation of desire,  
Complete renunciation of the will.

The radiator clanged and knocked,  
I thought it might be warmer soon,  
I thought I might rise from my bed  
To watch the night sky through the frozen pane  
And so I did,  
And when I did the room disturbed  
By steps across the creaking floor  
Was altered suddenly  
Then settled down into the winter's deep indoor  
Steam-heated ticking quiet;  
The open bed  
Shone dimly white, my watch still ticked  
In winter silence, and silently my thoughts ran riot  
In my head.

My thoughts ran over open fields  
That shone a dark blue in the night  
And fell away on every side  
Into the black of distance and bare woods,  
Completely cancelled by the ice and snow,  
Half-lit and terrible and barren in the moon's bright  
light  
The fields with their winter silence, winter darkness,  
death and cold  
Presented blank appalling emptiness.

I pressed my cheek against the frozen glass  
And saw the stars shine in its shallow depth.

And then I saw in my mind's eye  
The drifted snow the wind shaped into waves  
And saw the glittering puffs and eddy whorls  
Raised up by sudden gusts  
And then subsiding once again.  
The cold had frozen stiff the barbed wire fence  
Which glimmered icily, shining in moonlight,

And every now and then another gust of wind  
Would rattle it or waver it just slightly.

And as my mind went farther  
I could see the woods where darkness was  
Complete, disorienting, black,  
The trees a labyrinth extending farther in  
And reaching deeper back to a darkness  
Absolute and more alien still.  
The snow had no more light in it,  
The trees stood there all gaping limbs, all totally  
silent

Though in my vision  
Everything I saw  
Seemed silently to scream out emptiness and death.

And yet there was no sound at all,  
No real sound of wind  
Nor yet the slightest creaking of a bough.  
I felt somehow  
That everything should move or swirl around  
The center that I was  
Like some concentric maelstrom  
Or otherwise that there should be  
A reeling and a spinning from that very spot  
As though all things were toppling, fleeing to the  
edge  
Away from the insistent savage knot of hatred and of  
calculating fear  
Which I now was.

I felt  
The vomiting up of every particle of being  
Of the world in general and of my very self;  
With frozen hands I felt my numbed and mask-like  
face.

## II

At such a time  
One wants something to happen.  
Yet the trees don't move one single inch,  
Not even subtly to shift like pawns or rooks adjusted  
With each step you take  
Though silently and imperceptibly,  
But no there isn't even that.

It's dark and still and cold and soon you will be dead.

And then I ran  
(This too was in my dream)  
And tried to run beyond the dark of trees,  
Beyond the night made blacker by the trees.  
The snow was cloud-like underneath my feet,  
I couldn't feel the ground, my feet and hands  
Were numb, my face, a rubbery mask,  
Was going slowly dead.

And then  
I fell and snow was in my mouth  
And down my neck, although I felt no cold.

And turning on my back I hardly felt  
The earth beneath me as I lay face up

And staring at the blank and starry night.  
The stars turned silently above the earth,

The earth turned slowly in its place, and I  
Was borne upon its dead and silent surface

As though upon some water finally  
Definitely stilled or on some darkness

Like an ice flow in the midnight sea,  
Without sound or movement; I knew

The dark suppression, the stilling of all sense,  
A hushing quiet, suppression

Of everything I thought of as myself,  
Of everything I felt as present life,

Unraveling of intellect and flowing out of sense  
To darkness, blank opacity, irrelevance,

Immersion and dispersal of a scattered

Or a crumbling face, the mouth now dribbling  
Paralytically its insignificant breath,

The turning of a tide away from life  
and from the world itself.

What was the world itself? A small dead place  
Of cold and darkness turning round and round,

Of close or distant meaningless small lights  
That moved along the edges of the hill

And seemed to drift around my face.  
Or was this just my dream, or just the snow?

I couldn't tell, things had grown  
Too cold, too silent, although they had been loud,

Extremely loud with my own hard breath

Or with loud breathing throughout all the sky --

What were the shouts I heard? --

And as that breath intensified I reached  
To touch that throat, to touch the rush of air,

But there was nothing out there where I reached.  
My hand fell heavily against my face,

The snow was over me, the tiny lights,  
Were moving rapidly away, and then

My face was gradually closed up in darkness  
And the snow around me slowly closed as well.

My eyes were sightless and my face grew stiff and  
The snow was just a concept and the small <sup>fixed,</sup>

Small lights were gone, the shouts were gone,

A voice cried once and sounded far away, unreal

My face and only that was left there in the dark.

I lie in darkness in the empty room  
And meditate events  
Which brought me here  
Attempting futilely to track the path, the arc of life,  
Events --  
And meditate the nature of that chain,  
That memory of times of places and of acts  
Which you, I, we  
Tell over and again  
To come back where we started from --  
The crossing, the crossroads, intersection  
An hour and a place.  
And likewise I must think of that which meditates --  
What is it? Who can tell?  
What of this waking eye?

I know the floor is dark  
Is like a kind of plane  
Where darkness is  
From which it rises  
Like a tide that floods around me  
Filling the whole room and taking everything

My eye  
A single point of consciousness  
minute spark of phosphorescence  
In the silent sea

Is this the end of every route --  
every road  
Brings one at last to this?

Above, the blank of darkness not construable  
Below, more darkness, another night  
in the midst of these  
Suspended like a single dim light

The eye of selfhood in its meditative sleeplessness

It is the smallest margin  
Separating void from void conceivable  
The future from the past  
-- The present emptied as a thing of no account --

The actual and the conceivable  
Are kept apart or joined by virtue of this empty space

Yet since it is an empty space  
And knows itself as such  
The eye must close in sightless peace at length  
As you move inward, downward

To the place of more intense and most intense  
sadness

The very thing you are  
The essence of reality  
The sentiment, the feel and the sight of things  
All these are given up and finally are gone

Yet what remains amid this process of removal?

I light a candle and then drop the match  
Into the liquid wax pooled at the bottom of the jar  
A small hiss then it snuffs and smokes  
lies there shriveled, black, embalmed

a candle is lit with its own light

The process of my life  
Creates another elsewhere an apparent complement  
Shadowing or hidden, foreign to me, hypothetical  
A self I am creating for myself

And so not foreign, deeply intimate rather  
But obscurely so, a riddle which I try  
To understand, a puzzle, an enigma facing me  
Perhaps it is the total of one's words  
The total of one's thoughts and of one's acts  
The trace one leaves upon the world  
And if none on the world, then on the void

The sacred void, accepting  
Unthinkable, incommunicable

plenum of pure absence, the deep and depthless pool

This therefore is my only light  
devoted more to shadows than to light  
shadow's ambiguities  
ivory colored candle in its jar

fan-shape of light  
against one wall  
touching the corner of the ceiling

The light tremulous subtle  
like the surface of a water drop

active unstill  
its beige light on the wall  
is like a theatre in which the shadow of a hand  
might quiver up swell  
cover all an instant then slide away  
shadows tremble with a flame-like animation

It is a theatre of mind  
a kind of inner eye which sees

A fragile vibratory blur as when  
daylight quivers in your all but closed eyelashes

My hand is raised a moment  
darts into frame, then out again

This is a realm of pure forms, of ideas --  
As this one, for example, the idea  
Of a hand which though much like a hand  
Cannot harm anyone, and likewise  
All the forms apparent here  
Are forms of human gesture, human thought --  
The shadow of a hand, a head  
An arm, a lamp, a coffee cup  
These things are all quite harmless  
Yet all are in the dark and of the dark  
Enclosed, although  
their realm of apparition is dim light

Insubstantial things, empty diagram  
They have their only being in darkness  
these human things

The area in which they are, the light  
Is nothing but a world -- small, delicate, and islanded  
in night

And so, much like a world, it too can be put out

### III

My room is nothing but a clutter of old books  
papers, the moon  
Does not shine in on closed blinds and drapes

candle and light  
my sleeplessness

Floating weightless stelae massive  
tranquil and suffused  
with Rembrandt's radiance a light  
that pulses slowly as its planes advance  
or drift in muted confrontation of the spectator

Obscurely standing for some ritual now dead  
of which they are a memory and mute cipher

They are at first mere color but become  
A reservoir of auras, a visible resource  
An opening at last of living darkness  
Perfect comprehension of non-being  
both radiant and void

Mark Rothko  
Is the maker of such color and such light  
Of these ambiguous and illusory depths  
These visible enigmas --

Not real Rothkos though, of course

Just reproductions which will have to do  
And in the dim light they do well enough  
Taped on the ceiling  
Floating high above my bed

I lie here looking up and watch them fill  
With meaning, with intensity and palpable import  
And then resolve, recede

A throbbing visible at moments and then gone  
A confrontation, hieratic and subdued  
Quietly imperious, although vague

A solitary dream of color, cloud-like darkness  
luminous transcendence

## The oracular illusion not negotiable in words

Thus, lying in the dim light here  
I have these presences above me  
My darkness opening on their enigmatic light  
Their subtly vibrant tympanums, shadowed space

Drowsing, almost asleep, I see them still

## IV

One night I dreamed I lay in darkness  
In a room much like this room, and over me

Directly over me, were several doors  
Or openings -- not open, yet not closed --

Wavering slightly, beckoning, yet black  
With concentrated blackness like a well

Bespeaking depth and terror, totally  
Forbidding and yet dangerously there

And leading where? The future or the past?  
Perhaps to neither -- removed from any time

Remote from any world or any life,  
Baffling comprehension, twisting thought

Which cannot pass that gate or needle's eye  
Opening to the passageways of night

And corridors of rumor, secrecy --  
Things that are hidden, things far better hid

The womb of time and its monstrosities  
The elements of chance -- elusive, small,

Like DNA combined and recombined  
Spun out and measured, cut, and then re-spun

These endless depths, darkness of manifold  
Dimensions and incomprehensible intent

I watched and waited then passed through the doors  
Which one did I pass through? I couldn't tell

Yet choice was trivial now, irrelevant,  
Or improvised before the impending fact

It seemed that I had passed this way before  
Or had perhaps more probably in dreams

Of which this was the last significance  
Or rather say preliminary dreams

Had been precursors of this final one

The thing I dreamed next was an empty room  
All white, stark bare, and with one window -- square

And shaded by an off-white shade pulled down  
The color of egg shells, just like the walls

Yet with a polar tint -- light blue; the room  
Though white was still three quarters dark

I sat directly opposite the window  
In a straight-backed wooden chair -- I breathed,  
watched,

Watched longer, for the light to come to change  
The color in the shade's responsive space

Which breathed, dilated, altered depth and tone  
As it wavered while suspended in half-light

Yet measured glowing intervals a space  
Between it and the casement -- an edge of light

Around it, openings through which the day  
Cracked in, or nearly so, upon the dimness

Light swelled beyond the shade, beyond that ply,  
And burned in that illusory thin space

The bluish tint was brightening to grey  
Suffused with lilac, glowing steadily

Taking light from quick acetylene  
Flashes as the shade breathed out and in

I knew that light, a greater light, was there  
Although I couldn't see it clearly yet

But only by bright flares and inferences --  
All quick, tangential, mediated, false

How that faint square burned in my lidless gaze  
Though slightly swaying, drifting to dilate

Inward then receding to odd depth.  
I watched it from a greater distance now

The light was wavering, intense and strange  
And had a sharp high ringing sound -- and cold --

Light ringing in the ear and not the eye  
This freezing light, this radiant terror

Then suddenly I knew this was a dream  
For I was blind, my eyes gone white, burnt-out

Two lumps of ice, dull white like hail stones  
And slowly melting down my face My eyes

So long had been deceived My eyes had long been  
dead

There never had been light, nor luminous shade

Things had been otherwise

I had been staring into absolute  
Banality, a scribbled wall or less

An opaque surface, blank, a wall of dirt

I had been staring into sickness  
Wretchedness, the nauseating taste  
of wasted life, of lives, my life  
laid waste --  
The covert theatre of self  
A concentrated hatred and disgust concealed  
Deferred revulsion there disguised as life

And then I realized that I was bound  
as though I were held hostage, I was tied  
down to the chair  
and tightly twisted ropes, like pliers  
Fraying skin, cutting off the blood  
Even as warm blood trickled down my palms

My legs were nailed to the chairs' front legs.  
that's how it felt, as though barbed wire  
had cut my shins open  
and my insteps too -- the blood  
ran down my ankles and my shoes were wet  
The floor was sticky, as though with drying paint

The holes throbbed where my eyes had been ripped  
out

I remembered now that they had been  
and two white stones  
inserted in their place -- I felt  
them as you feel a severed limb, a ghost,  
an absence, insufficiency supplied by pain

A handkerchief was clotted in my mouth --  
a bloody handkerchief, I couldn't speak  
The monstrous thought  
occurred to me that I would find  
the after-image of my face on it  
if only I could rise and spit it out

I couldn't spit it out and couldn't stand  
nor could I shout out loud, nor move at all  
my head hung down,  
and every now and then the thought  
passed through my mind of beckoning sunlight  
and of a luminous suspended shade

I woke and found myself alone  
and lying in the dark  
What time was it? Near morning? Where was I?  
The luminous dial of my watch  
said ten minutes after one: I'd slept  
three hours though it felt like days

I peered down in the darkness at my watch face  
glowing tinily with its greenish light  
like phosphorescence in the midnight sea  
It had no numbers, just small lines  
green dashes like a small sundial

My head was foggy, my eyes still blurred with sleep  
The black ambiguous space I stared into  
held only one thing clearly visible  
these notches of green light  
which moved whenever I moved,  
each one an hour of my life

It was a meter running  
which I could not stop, yet what  
was being meted out? Mere time  
which can't be seen or touched, is mostly felt  
by tapping on the walls of memory  
The dial floated in the empty dark  
and yet was still obscurely part of me  
wrapped snugly around my pulse

My heart was pounding  
Again I thought what had awakened me?  
I stared into the dark but couldn't see  
It was as if two hands  
were held against my eyes  
I sat up straight and listened for the sound

So Panic whispered moving softly  
with his flute of bone  
and Death which was a child beating on his drum  
They both came closer, stalking, watching me:  
The small flute, tiny, deep inside my head  
The small drum beating louder in my ear  
They both were in the darkness, out of reach  
Among the shadows of the curtains  
Moving around me moving closer, darkness hidden  
in the dark

And then it lightened gradually

And I could see a bit  
And saw the outline of the dresser and the chair  
My desk and then the black shape of the door  
Which gaped there like a cave or like a silent scream  
Somehow the door was open wide  
A space which led to further passages

I heard strange sounds that seemed to come  
From there The flute had gotten louder now  
The drum now more insistent

I felt  
The after-echo, the silver and seraphic overtones  
Unearthly, series upon series  
Infinite, precise,  
Cloudlike and radiant, and cold

Then warmer by degrees

And then blindness

Now everything was light, the room  
Was burning with strange light  
Though still I couldn't see and all was dark

Since this was light that one could only hear

I felt a deep warmth, then felt that I'd been called

And heard my voice call back

and then I knew

Musical visionary, strange Catholic artist  
He'd come to seek from me the words, however  
vague,

Approximate or limited  
The words he did not need in life  
Having his occult music of the birds

And so I recognized your presence -- Messiaen  
The lingering vibration of your being  
Which I called by name --  
Olivier Messiaen

He spoke first, having greater cause to speak:  
"The music you refer to was not all.  
Words may be weak, yet notes are also weak.

I was possessed by a rapture for the real.  
The world itself was music, which I heard  
And which became a sense of mystical

And overwhelming transport that I shared,  
Or tried to, by the music which I wrote.  
But soon I realized that no one cared.

They paid attention only to the note  
And totally ignored the spirit there  
Which seemed to them eccentric and remote

From their concerns, but good enough for their  
Fine patronizing tolerance or scorn.  
This was the judgment that I had to bear.

Such judgments you have been at pains to learn  
In misdirected life, for in no word  
Of all you write could anyone discern

An innate joy, the holy gratitude  
Toward what has been created, toward what is,

And the eternal presence of the Lord.

Yet to be angry with such foolishness  
Would be itself foolish. You are just part  
Of a world too venal and too restless

To understand the deeper truth of art,  
Crude, superficial and self-satisfied,  
Brutal and self-absorbed, and with no heart

To pity suffering, which you have multiplied,  
And with no mind for what cannot be sold  
And little for what cannot be applied

To your fine project of turning blood to gold,  
An impressive technical accomplishment.  
Thus the new world has surpassed the old.

And yet it isn't your enlightenment  
That is my main concern. The only thing  
That is required of you is the commitment

Of your literary skill. What I have sung  
In notes you must sing differently in words,  
As I have sung in praise, so you must sing.

I understood the music of the birds,  
Your medium is unpredictable.  
Yet every subtlety that it affords

Must be employed with concentrated skill  
Coherent with ardor and intellectual love.  
You must create the more-than-beautiful.

Accomplish what will give artistic proof  
Of transcendental goodness, of divine  
Light visible and redemption from above.

Compose a work in which the whole design  
Bears witness to the Lord, and bears the risk  
That such a task requires in every line."

And I: "How could I undertake a task  
Beyond my powers and beneath my pride?  
Nor do I understand why you would ask.

All this is alien. Nor can I hide  
My disaffection and mistrust from you  
Who draws the curtain of the soul aside

To look within, or could if you wished to.  
Surely you know I cannot share your faith  
And am unwilling and unfit to do

What you have asked me to. It would be death  
For both the mind and creativity  
To imitate your own creative path."

And he: "One might expect some such reply.  
You are too proud. Yet it isn't my concern  
To tell you all, nor even to tell why

This has been asked, and I will not return  
Repeating and explaining what I've said,  
Nor could I ever teach what you must learn.

Yet this much I can say: you have been dead  
To much in your own life. Experience  
Is like dark halls. We don't know where we're led.

And yet with something somewhat beyond sense  
We feel our way along the walls. Each crack,  
Although we can't say what it represents,

Is traced like Braille, questioned like the track  
Of not-completely-lucid memory  
Or probed and tapped and tested in that black

And mirroring void, the midnight sea  
And labyrinth of metamorphoses.  
Yet from these hairline cracks a mystery

Is seeping like fine dust, and it is these --  
Enigmas of the night and not the day --  
That you must ultimately sense and seize.

Yet how can this be done? Is there some way  
That one can grasp the rightness of the whole  
Merely by instinct and half-effortlessly?

On closer thought, it seems impossible.  
Yet still you might be guided by the thought  
Of letting effort educate the soul.

Thus, rather than evade the task I've brought,  
You must embrace it. Work will bring on faith.  
Only by action can you weaken doubt,

Though not destroy it. Only by this path  
Will you be able to avoid the hell  
Of frozen, constricted, spiritual death.

You must believe me, and consider well.  
For if you should refuse, or, what is worse,  
Consider this a dream -- dismissible --

You'll end up bringing punishment, a curse,  
Upon yourself, for if you will not give  
Yourself this way, in dedicated verse,

You will be closeted and made to live  
Entirely within that self. And there  
You will not sleep but endlessly relive

Disgraces you've already seen before  
In previous and painful recollection  
And which you'll live once more and yet once  
more."

After he had said this, he was gone,  
And I was left there in the dark alone.

## V

For several nights I lay there  
Wondering and without sleep,  
My bloodshot lidless eye upon the dark,  
The dark above my bed, above my head  
Where Rothko's light and resonant obscurity  
Was like a puzzle to me  
And a strange chastisement  
That I could not understand.

Here comprehension drew a blank,  
Its grasp so weak

That everything slipped out of it:  
Time, self, and thought, and my strange dream,  
Disquieting enigma and nightmare.  
What could I know?

And yet I knew one thing: the thought was in me  
Of my real failure,  
Of my pointless uninspired life.  
However it had come, the notion came  
And stayed with me, nor could I shake it off:  
The sense of having written trivialities,  
Of having lived an empty life,  
A trivial writer and a trivial man --  
This thought had taken hold of me -- ineradicable,  
Relentless, impossible to dodge.  
The thought was working in me  
Like some ulcerous disease, a death  
Repeated endlessly, or like a sense of falling,  
The dreamer falling infinitely far  
Through darkness now unreal,  
And he himself now totally unreal  
But for the sickening and spinning feeling,  
And endless grieving for the thing now lost.  
Or sometimes it was like a screw  
Being twisted in my brain,  
A secret canker of the mind  
That I knew would never end.

How much the thought recurred to me,  
Therefore, of needing to fulfill  
The strange request I'd dreamed, or had not dreamed.

I lay there in the dark night after night  
And could not sleep, and when I closed my eyes

The images of past disgraces came  
Relentlessly and filled me with disgust.

I could not change. I could not get away  
From that which was my life, my very self,

The landscape of debris where my mind's eye  
Wandered without rest and searching

For a fragment of some truth about the world,  
For a fragment of my past, past time, dead time:

A barren landscape and yet a very small one.

## VI

In this night context the significance  
Of what I'd dreamed or had not dreamed was vague

Although oppressive and imperious.  
I could not see it, yet I felt it there,

Around me in the black space, over me,  
Within me -- and now how strangely deep within:

For though it seemed a puzzle and a curse,  
I wanted it, it was a power as well,

A primitive power and a high constraint,  
An abstract and imponderable thing

And yet as close as my own body, my own mind,  
And their desire for nobility.

So in this way the claims of loyalty  
Fidelity invaded, took possession of my mind.

The mappings which my eye traced on the dark  
Were plotted around one darker central point

Which was a point of thought, a point of doubt,  
And one of muted honor finally.

The thought was of the unreality of life:  
All things were lighter than a mote of dust,

As insubstantial as a single breath.  
The night itself was merely a dark word,

A sound I could not hear but yet  
Could feel around me -- cold, inanimate and void.

My doubt was of the truth of what I'd dreamed.  
Not that I gave it literal credence:

I had seen no pedagogical spirit,  
His visitation was a dream I'd had.

And yet what was the subject of this dream  
If not the nature of my life itself?

And if this was the subject of a dream,  
Life's import might be likewise found in dream,

For what is comprehended by a dream  
Except a thing analogous in its kind?

My life might be analogous to dreams,  
Therefore, or be a dream itself: import

Conceived and brought forth by some principle  
And motivation not of physical intent.

It is not merely meaning but import,  
For every meaning is a finite thing,

Yet import cannot help but move outward  
Like ripples on a pond, concentrically,

Its final circles infinitely far  
From their originating center point,

Like echoes echoing beyond earshot.  
I closed my eyes and searched with inner eye

And listened with the most attentive ear  
Yet could not find an echo of his speech

Or find the faintest traces of his steps  
Across the inner landscape of my mind.

The visitation of the night was gone  
From ear and eye before the violet light

And left there almost nothing of itself.  
Therefore I had this doubt about its truth:

There was no motivating deep significance  
In things beyond themselves, not in my dream

And not in anything. All things were blank  
And bare of any intimate or general intent.

And this included my perplexing dream --  
It was just nothing, imbecilities,

The inane rubbish that consumed my mind,  
My tireless self-invalidating curse --

To dream and dream and dream, both day and night,  
And hardly touch reality at all.

To dream and dream both day and night,  
This was my life, the substance of my life.

It was contemptible I knew, and yet  
The muted honor, furtive, a fine thread,

Strung through the beaded episodes of time,  
Was that I trust my dreams, and live them through,

And comprehend them, peering through their depths  
To glimpse some intricate or useable power.

I could not bother to concern myself  
With whether this power actually was there.

I had to simply suffer through the dream,  
Quieting my thought to let it take

The impress of it, however strange it might be,  
Creating complex counterfeits of words,

Words ordered by number, secrecy, and thought.

## VII

The dream had pressed illusion on my mind  
And everything was lightened by the breath

Of unreality, the world was now  
As weightless as blown dandelion seed.

And yet a seed is fruitful, and the world,  
Likewise, is multiplied in later worlds

Displacing former ones, all here and now,  
Each thing a point where forces

Interlock like millstones, monumental,  
Grinding, absolute, and light as air.

And weightless though it is, it is as real  
As you yourself are: a turning sea

Whose dissolution of past eyes and minds,  
Past bodies, fern fronds, granite, thistledown,

Creates anew new realms of mind, new flesh,  
New grinding stone -- all light as thistledown

Because created from a shadowy thing,  
Begotten by an absence on a lack,

The substitution of nonentities  
For others just now gone, though never there

Since they in their turn of such an origin  
Were shadows of a shadow precedent,

The waves and currents of a turning sea  
Which teeming though it is, is also void.

The rolling shadows of the wind on wheat  
Are equal to the wheat, are part of it,

No less than evening's copper sun is part,  
Its ghost-like surf a man can walk right through,

Its weightless breakers foaming then cut low,  
Its heavy seed as bronze as pouring shot,

Its chaff as white and numerous as sand.

## VIII

Yet in the middle of the turning sea,  
As we negotiate its time and tide

Caught in its manifold evolving drift,  
Rapt in its currents, and yet circumspect,

Nearly detached at times -- disturbingly --  
We seize on images that come to mind

Or which seize us: memory calls and haunts  
To beckon us beyond its images.

For certainly the image is not why  
The memory of times, of places, acts

Remains and calls continually to us  
To reckon with its intimate vocation,

Covert, suspected in the nature of  
The thing, or in the nature of ourselves,

Or buried deeper still beyond that realm --  
Meaning beyond sense, imageless import

Beyond all figure, past all appearances  
From which it's drawn, a palpable idea

Which yet cannot be viewed by eye or mind,  
But is experienced blindly, wordlessly;

Prior to eros, prior to idea,  
To any figural glamour or transport,

And wearing mutely like the memory  
Of guilt, long after guilt is purposeless,

Or like an ambience, like the climate  
Of conscience famished for its human truth,

Or like the deepest fear beyond all fear,  
The primitive and substanceless haunting

Beyond all reason, without object, pure,  
An inner current of anxiety -- your life.

Like grains of sand, or like the whitest flour,  
Time falls and falls upon you, settles over you,  
And settles on your face and on your hands and  
clothes.

## IX

So year by year you grow a bit more pale,  
More dusted over with time, more bleached and  
white;

Time is the ash that settles like the ash on coal  
And which, like it, conceals a deeper fire

Now too impaired, inhibited -- and all  
By fear, fear of the world and fear of death.

And this fear keeps you running, continually  
Turning through the cycles of appearances.

When these appearances are lost to time,  
When you drop through them, and your memory,

Bereft of any image, now beholds  
The blank impalpable idea, the sacred void,

Let the fear go, let the buried fire cool,  
And let the coal go dark behind your eyes.

You must embrace this necessary dark

Beyond all selfhood, prior to conception,  
Beyond your many superimposed lives.  
Yet though one does, appearances are there,  
Both as one lives and on the point of death.

## X

Thus, in one's waking life appearances  
Are there, and we must move among them there.

So we must go along, participating in  
This substitution of non-entities.

But how long can you play the game,  
The chance-intoxicated game? All night?

Or less than that? Will you continue to?  
Must you not stop at some point finally?

For love and will are finite and become  
Desire for non-existence, for an end

To possibilities no longer new,  
Exhausted by themselves: an end to life,

The chance-intoxicated game -- you wish  
Not to participate, to play no more.

And this must be desire not to will,  
To will the possibility of life withdrawn

And thus to will the world itself withdrawn.  
To will the option that life not exist

And will, therefore, the end,  
The non-existence of the world.

This is one version of the meaning of my dream.

## XI

And so I did not need to recollect  
The bright or dark particulars of what

I'd dreamed, of what I'd seen or heard. Indeed,  
They slipped my memory. I had no choice.

And yet the import and decaying sense  
Of what I must conjecture as my dream

Continued in my mind, something I felt  
Although I could not see it, nor yet could hear.

Still it remained, a part of me, a force  
I could not locate or identify

Which I was moved in darkness to interpret  
And retell for you with these details

Invented for their hoped-for resonance  
Of truth, though with no confidence of that.

It was a dream I dreamed up, for the real dream  
And the substance of that dream are gone.

I offer a contrivance of the truth.

Like all words spoken in the dark,  
I know it must be error, travesty.

Yet nonetheless I step forth into error  
To say what is both true and yet not true,

To feel the paradox of speech --

Willing no longer to participate,

Willing that I not exist  
And willing not to will,

Willing the non-existence of the world.

## XII

I watched the glassy sea one day,  
The sea of light and created fire.  
It didn't flow, it burned, that sea  
As bright as incandescent wire.

So bright, but where did it begin?  
A thousand waves were glaring chrome.  
I wondered how I'd ever come  
To comprehend its origin.

And where the dark Leviathan swims  
The sleeper moved its burning limbs,  
Its form a blur, its outline bright  
Amid the uncongenial light.

The fallen form of light amid  
That empty and reflected sun  
Turned as though dreaming on its bed,  
The bed of bestial creation.

A sleeping consciousness was there  
Amid the desert of the sea,  
The sea that spread out flat and bare  
And seemed to sparkle endlessly.

What could I do to call awake  
That light, that mind, the form that lay  
An outline in the burning lake  
And dreamed amid the burning sea?

I called and called; nothing arose,  
And when I knew that it would not  
The whole sea shrank before my eyes  
Into an insubstantial blot,

The erotic pool of origins  
Shrunk to a puddle, to a drop,  
A residue and what remains  
When time has dried the water up.

Then everything within that pool  
Was gone, like scratch marks in the dust,  
The processes of nature still  
And all their products gone at last.

And light was gone, or if there was  
Still light it only seemed to be  
One moment of an inner cause  
That was itself in fast decay.

Yet even though there was no light  
Without, and likewise none within,  
My mind was clear, I gained insight  
And knew disgust of such origin.

I wondered what it could have been  
That I had seen, or thought I saw,  
Within that blinding glare and when  
I unequivocally would know.

I stood in vertigo of thought --  
Obscure significance of light --  
And silently I raised a shout  
As though in protest or in hate.

Then, like an echo, day returned.  
The waves glared as they had before.  
The sun was high, a sea gull turned  
Against the breeze, boats made toward shore.

O vanity and monstrous cause  
Of all monstrosity, supreme  
Entangler of entangling laws,  
Source of defiling light, of time,  
Perplexed causality, and space,  
Where your obscenities take place,

Of earth itself, which bears the scars  
Of forces, of which you were first,  
Why did you dissipate your first  
Perfection in a million stars?

Why did you interrupt the peace  
Of nothingness, creating light  
Where there was neither time nor space  
Yet making nothing worthy of my sight?

It seemed another's voice had spoken through my  
own.

I couldn't understand my dream.  
I hated it. I hated what  
I dimly felt it stood for. I hated everything.  
Yet still I felt it as a motive or a call.  
In deference, therefore,  
I decided to comply with what was after all  
My own construction of the unrecallable --  
In deference, and yet still in my own way.

In deference, therefore, and  
In honor of the dream  
I would make now, on eight successive nights,  
A canticle.

# I

In darkness I at last lie down  
And shall be rid of all these works  
Which have been made, for dark  
Is darker still, the ice and snow  
Still deeper over the entire town.  
Therefore, the heavens and the earth are through  
And all the hosts of them,  
And so in darkness I at last lie down.

Of marriage and of sanctifying  
Human life and death,  
Creation and renewal,  
Conception, effort, birth,  
And sleep at night and ultimately death --  
I shall be rid of these.  
And I renounce all sanctifying rites  
And I renounce all mortal life and breath,  
Creation and renewal,  
Conception, effort, birth,  
In favor of this final death.

I hear the breeze blow through the night  
And murmuring stir the arbor's leaves,  
As the many fragrances of summer night

Drift through the arbor, through its darkness,  
In its place of privacy.  
Shadows among shadows, the leaves  
Were ragged woven black shapes  
Fluttering in the occasional breeze.  
We lay together there, the two of us alone.

In the garden full of marigold and mint,  
Wisteria and dogwood  
And the plum tree waving in the night's warm breeze,  
Near the lattice full of honeysuckle,  
White and thick and lit with silver light,  
In the intricate shadows of the jasmine vines,  
In the quietude of that soft place,  
The softly damp night air  
Mysterious with scent on scent perplexed me.  
How many perfumes of the garden  
Gathered there I never knew.

In the garden full of silence,  
Full of basil and spearmint,  
I heard the trickling of the distant stream,

The small brook followed by the moon  
Or following the moon  
Through all its long incalculable course.  
The pink moon and the orange moon  
Had scattered opal quavers in the midnight stream.  
The blue metallic dust of stars  
Was falling constantly  
Until the night was indigo and then completely black,  
Until it had not one small point of light,  
For all the stars were gone  
And everything was dark.  
The stream was black as oil and the night,  
And both were flowing onward,

Flowing infinitely far.  
I heard the sound of water which the stars had fallen  
in.

The chalk moon burned like phosphorous  
And trembled like a fire in the stream.

In the garden full of silence,  
Full of jasmine and of roses,  
I heard the sound of water, fainter and then fainter  
still,  
The sound of water following the hot white moon.

Even now the night still lingers in my thoughts.

The body of the world, the body of a woman,  
Both flow from darkness and return to it  
As I myself do likewise,  
As all things likewise do.  
But do they hold a particle of light?  
Can you believe that life  
Is something to be valued and thought good?  
The body of a woman, the body of the world,  
Both in the dark stream flow away from me.  
And I close my eyes.

## II

And when I close my eyes  
I see the fireflies drifting through the garden  
Where they sparkled once, leading  
My eye on deeper into darkness.  
Though now the garden disappears,  
And the eye led toward that deeper night  
Goes where?

What is the darkness into which I stare  
Now that every remnant of the night is gone?  
The darkness of the human eye itself?  
Its own inherent blank  
And that of both my body and my mind,  
Incapable of living, yet incapable of death?

And if I were so capable,  
Of living or of death,  
Still, what would I find in either place?  
In the cloister of my half-quiet heart,  
I think of that lost garden, that dead summer night --  
The thousand scattered stars apparently so near,  
Black and ragged masses of the leaves against  
the deep blue sky,  
The scent of grass and complex midnight chill.  
I wonder what it would have been in any case  
And wonder what it was.

And yet I know.  
It was a blank itself --

A zero, a mere blot, a smear,  
A flaw inside the crystal of the void.  
And so the emptiness which is my heart,  
This retrospective quiet,  
Dreams for itself a fitting complement.

Who then has set man over all things living  
And given him dominion over all?  
This mistake, this monstrous thing  
Which cannot live,  
This clot of hatred and contemptible affection,  
This walking death.

And lying in the darkness in the night  
I slept and dreamed.

And in my dream I saw the tree  
Which I had seen before.  
Its branches arched high over me  
In dome on dome of bright translucent green and  
yellow-green  
With fissures of white sun  
Breaking through the aqueous green shade,  
And saffron yellow flakes  
And emerald softer light -- the many layers  
Of complexly vaulted leaves.

The tree had its own life,  
A breathing swaying resilience, although sleeping,  
Active in each leaf and twig and branch.  
It was a whole world in itself,  
And order which I could not comprehend.

So, curled within  
The tree's inverted crotch, not half way up,  
Yet still far from the ground,  
I crouched there, watched and listened,  
Waited, swayed  
With the movement of the breeze-blown trunk.  
Great waves of light and air  
Flowed through the tree  
And flowed through me.  
The tree's tall crests were like huge sails  
That rolled and rippled  
In the wind.

I swayed  
Upon that mast,  
The green and glittering sea below, and dew  
Flowed over me,  
And when I touched it to my lips  
I saw and heard what I had missed till then:  
A thousand birds were loose about,  
Were fluttering from branch to branch,  
Birdsong was clattering and trilling  
Like a thousand creaking gates.  
It was an arbor of green birds and birds of light.  
The green shade and the darker spots  
Were full of gold wings, yellow wings, and white,  
And had as many eyes.  
The leaves held eyes of all beasts of the earth;  
Their ears were listening,  
Leaves' shadows were their creeping forms --  
Passing into one another, passing out again.  
At moments, one would stand clear in the sun.

The leaves  
Held eyes of all beasts of the earth,  
All fowl of the air.

They all had eyes of agate, jade,  
Of copper or black ink.  
Each leaf had grass-green eyes or shadow eyes.  
I saw the eyes of cattle peering out,  
The eyes of panther, elk or muskrat,  
Of possum, weasel, deer,  
Green lizards and the red fox,  
The aphid on the leaf, the red ant and the black.  
The leaves were full of insects, frogs and creeping  
things.

The branch became a serpent in my grasp,  
And fish would disappear in shadow  
From beneath my hand.  
The crinkled bark revealed a thousand forms.

I looked up  
And the sun was white and hot  
Above the tree and larger in the sky  
Than it had been.

And then the sun grew larger and then larger still  
And larger still, and hotter,  
And still larger --

Until everything was burnt  
And everything was gone  
And all was dark.

A scattering of ash lay in the dark.

### III

The moving waters of the sleeping world were no  
longer creased with movements of the creatures of  
the turning sea.

For that which was in any case still-born had settled  
finally and stopped.

Now only ash was left upon the waters which lay still  
and blank.

Now only ash was left upon the waters lying silently  
beneath the dark.

Now only ash was left to drift through darkness and the  
abyss of stars.

For now the stars were left there sparkling, scattering  
about, like puffs of sparkling ash that circulate  
and settle finally.

The mute dead sea was hanging like a crust of ash, it was a  
sea of dust, of sea of lead, a sea of stone.

The ash moved slightly, like a pile of cinders in the  
moonlight sifted by the wind.

Its skin was wrinkled inward by a movement -- something  
hidden, struggling beneath, or sinking slowly  
down,

A wrinkle or a ripple on the surface like a scar denoting  
something previously there and now not there, a  
strangled or contested birth, a death.

For the world of waters and the multiplying seas no longer  
was, nor had it ever been.

The moving waters of the still-born world were no longer  
creased with movements of the creatures of the  
calm.

#### IV

The stars that marked the night  
Were scattered like a wake of phosphorescence  
In the parted seas,  
The parted seas that rushed together now.

Over multiplying seas of genesis  
Stars drifted once with their geometry  
And watched them, ordered them  
With mathematics, fables, grace and light.  
Yet now the seas of night  
Were coming to an end,  
The seas of genesis  
Were drying to some final beads of sweat.

The stars were moving through the void of space,  
Were scattering like sparks, like flakes of cinders  
Glowing, sparkling and fluttering to dissolve  
Against the depthless black  
Or melting to the darkness of the sea  
No longer visible.

The two great lights of sun and moon  
No longer ruled the day nor ruled the night.  
Below, and it seemed infinitely far,  
They were just areas of color and faint light  
Like two last embers of the fire  
When the room's completely dark.  
The moon was just a small white disk,  
The flashing of a coin,  
The sun a cauled and fulvid yellow  
Like the yellow of an egg yolk streaked with blood.  
For the sun was fissuring and breaking up,  
Cracking like a geode,  
Crumbling.

And gradually as I looked on  
The moon went dark -- it faded like a coal,  
And the sun went dusty like a larger coal.  
It flared once, then twice,  
And then it seemed to cool and crust with ash,  
To curdle like a blister drying up,  
Collapsing on itself.

The sea of night was filled with violence --  
A thousand waves that were not waves,  
A thousand winds that were not winds.

It was the lurchings of a world gone out --  
The pitchings of disintegrating space,

The yawning of disoriented time,  
The nothingness of all  
Which now was rushing in upon itself,  
No longer parted by the central void  
Nor by the universal echo of that central silence.

There, poised above the ruins of the sun,  
I observed the holy chaos of the night.

## V

And far below I saw the earth adrift --  
A small white flower in the stream  
Which flowed more rapidly,  
With greater violence  
As though to flow beyond all ends,  
Though it was quickly coming to its end.  
The flower of the earth was crushed --  
It was a ruined thing, now breaking up,  
Dissolving in the glittering green seas.

The earth was breaking  
Like a thin ice-crust;  
The waters of the heavens turning,  
Shattering the wasted land.

For the order of the heavens and the seas  
Was overturned.

## VI

Because the order of the heavens  
And the seas was overturned  
The waters flowed back through the voided memory  
Of that initial place  
Which has no memory  
And which was dying like an echoed sound  
Just barely echoing.  
The waters that had once been parted  
Flowed together now,  
Like a furrow in the sand  
Effaced and smooth.  
The waters which had been above  
Rushed down to meet those below,  
And those below  
Were mingled with those above.

The cipher and its theatre of origins  
Was blanked,  
The infinitely ramifying chalk line  
Traced in gesture on the dark,

Meiosis of originating night --

These things were names eluding memory,  
Were empty sounds  
Were silences  
Were not.

## VII

Then finally there was just  
One small light  
Which separated darkness from itself.  
It was the smallest margin  
Separating void from void conceivable,  
Dividing one infinity of dark  
From every other one.

It was an insubstantial thing, this light,  
Was merely an illusion, pure semblance,  
And had its only being in darkness.

The area in which it was  
Was nothing in itself, was not.

The light was small, and delicate, and islanded in  
night.

Then, finally, it faded and went out.

## VIII

In the beginning there was nothing.

Only my voice.

In the beginning there was nothing.

Yet still I hear my voice.

Shadow of light  
Self-knowing voice  
Who could not answer?  
Since there is no light.

There is no warrant for hope.

Beauty not even  
Slightly manifest  
I have yet seen  
And I have heard.

There is no end to thought.

Who could not answer  
All I have seen  
What I have heard,  
Shadow of light?

This, on the eighth night, was my canticle.



## **BOOK FOUR: SECOND WORLD**

## **Second World**

So drunk on the burdock hill I watch  
the morning's stars that drift and float  
like metal filings past a swatch  
of chicory that's near my throat

The bird's nest of dried Queen Anne's lace  
shivers slightly with each gust  
of early breeze, I raise my face  
and see the sun's hinge bright with rust

A coast of bare trees on the hill  
is holding back the sun's match flare  
with dark kindling, cool morning air  
is rainy and irresistible

My head pounds as I try to rise,  
I reach and see into the dim, my whole  
head surges, spins and the trees whirl,  
ditch mud like sleep has caked my eyes

The stars fade in the late spring sky,  
the ground tips as I try to stand  
I prop myself up with one hand,  
time to get up, or at least try

## II

But grass as stiff as broom spines near  
my face is crackling tinily,  
unbending through my down-pressed ear,  
unfolding to the ear and eye

The reek of earth comes up to me  
and with it comes a sense of what  
I cannot hear and cannot see  
but feel around me without doubt

Earth crumbs offered without stint,  
given, taken away again --  
stems roots dirt and the odd flint,  
layer on layer leading on and on

I see the graves of loved and lover  
each non-existent cheek or lip  
or empty socket staring up  
through the rotted casket cover

I feel the breath they do not have,  
an odor of wet clay or mud  
or moldy damp inside a cave,  
strange, and neither good nor bad

Yet though still partly drunk I see  
more clearly than the others can

the lies of all the others there,  
their greed and sharp hypocrisy  
and ludicrous self-satisfaction

How the exploited point them out  
accusingly, and while they do  
those exploiting continue to,  
cloaked in their rationale of hate

I see some old men on the street  
eating garbage, dressed in rags  
or sleeping on a subway grate  
their feet wrapped up in plastic bags

An old woman who can't pay her rent  
sits with her boxes on the curb --  
soaked through with sleet, aimless arthritic bent,  
lady and landlord in some far suburb

I see the poor man and his wife  
turned out like Joseph from the inn --  
no health insurance and the rules are stiff,  
no hospital will take her in

I see the mentally disturbed  
kept worse than animals in zoos,  
squatting in urine, handcuffed to a bed  
beaten by attendants, maybe raped

I see the worker just let go --  
reading standing at the factory gate  
Whose decision? Why? He'll never know  
Capital decided to relocate

I see small children without food --  
their stomachs swell and their attention shrinks  
They cry at first then grow subdued,  
accepting their place in the scheme of things

Is this America? I thought  
this hell of poisoned water earth and air?  
this pile of garbage left to rot?  
this carnival of swindles? this drugged whore?

Is the lost America of love  
so truly lost now, never to be found?  
except as parody The country's end  
is like a joke of which we've had enough

The lost America of hope  
of justice and integrity  
gives way to mediocrity,  
nepotism, usury, and dope

How much longer will it be  
before the books are burned? before  
the battering ram against the door?  
before the final iniquity?

Hail Republican Fascists! Hail white  
supremacist white trash bastards!  
the Reverend \_\_\_ and the Christian Right!  
Hail the New Covenant and its swords!

How much longer will it be  
before the undream-like collapse  
of the dream-inflated economy?  
before the moonlight ladder snaps?

How much longer will it be  
before the lynchings start again?  
before the bombings start? Before we see  
the hoods and sheets rise up again?

Go to Bedford Stuyvesant!  
Go to East Los Angeles!  
See the unforgivable want  
hiding in the golden cities

I see the mobs of neo-nazi punks  
smashing store front windows in,  
beating up panhandlers and old drunks  
setting a boy on fire with gasoline

Skin heads with pipes and baseball bats  
looking for a foreigner to kill,  
cruising side streets and parking lots  
pick out an African and break his skull

Drug dealers with machetes and shot guns  
do their business in the street,  
right out among the cars, since they're the  
ones  
in charge and the cops cooperate

The slum apartment with no door,  
no heat, no working toilet  
an addict lying on the floor  
half-conscious in her own vomit

What can be done to change all this?  
'Nothing,' I hear beneath the promises  
Nothing is what they really want to do  
since they're content with things just as they are

Each within the "secret room" of self  
huddled in terminal narcissism,  
rapt in the auto-hypnotism  
of the sovereign, consuming, liberated self

The citizens of freedom's land  
avid for life-like images  
whether they come from movies or the news  
sit waiting for the show to start or end

The unborn-living living-dead  
Eat, shit, watch TV, and die  
They never learn. What can be said  
of a truly base frivolity?

### III

No money left I go downtown  
to see what I can find,  
looking in the street  
for a bite to eat

At the corner of Temple and Market  
in Hartford, Connecticut  
I see the end of one particular empire  
as they throw the trash into the fire

Why is there so much traffic?  
-- everyone's so caught up in themselves  
Silently the buildings crack  
and teeter in the April wind

So many people in the street,  
nothing left to do or say  
There will come a time, a day,  
looking for a bite to eat

#### IV

There was an old woman  
who lived in a shoe,  
who lived in a cardboard box  
on the street  
She didn't have heating  
or a toilet or a shower,  
she ate from the dumpster  
whenever she ate

Then three clever men  
who lived in a box,  
who lived in a much bigger  
five sided box

with papers and papers  
and guards and many locks

Came asking for money  
they wanted her money  
they needed her money  
for their friends overseas,  
for missiles and bombers  
the Israeli defense force  
and various and sundry  
liberation armies

And they needed her box  
and they needed the street  
including the dumpster  
and the garbage she ate

## V

One day while I was passing through downtown  
people had gathered on the Court Street bridge  
Talking and shuffling, most were looking down  
into the channel where cops paced the ledge

I weaved my way in closer through the crowd  
and then I saw -- a suicide, what fun!  
The others said this too, though not out loud,  
they stood around assessing the occasion

One cop swam out and grabbed him by the hair,  
another popped up underneath his arm  
He was himself quite passive, simply there  
His jacket billowed out as though in a storm

Though not drowned or distended yet he looked  
as light and buoyant as a cumbersome  
air mattress or perhaps those mannequins stocked  
as novelty amusements for the lonesome

What a resistant load he proved to be!  
Then he was grappled tight, hand over hand  
they hauled him up as limp as wet laundry  
and heavy, evidently, as a bag of sand

I happened to glance down and saw his shoes  
which he had left behind, right by my feet  
Black leather gleaming bright Meanwhile the  
street  
was filling with more people and The News

They tried to interview his sobbing wife  
or girlfriend, since she happened to be there  
Had she any idea why? Just something brief,  
they'd really like to get it on the air

They packed him in the ambulance to go  
they thought he'd live, although nothing was  
spoken  
They thought "He's still alive, maybe...." But no,  
he died that evening, for his neck was broken

One boring night a nagging impulse takes  
me to the bridge to watch the current there  
The Holiday Inn's bright cursive sign makes  
a scrawl of neon green across black water

## VI

At a crack in time I heard:  
"The spirits say there are two worlds  
And twilight is the gap between,  
When light and darkness intermingle  
Allowing both realms to be seen,  
The world of darkness, and of light;  
The dark world that we see by day  
Shows faded in the partial night,  
The world of light we almost see  
Is darkened nearly visible, yet cannot stay."

But at crack in time I watched  
The darkened daylight fall,  
The streaming sun coagulate  
Into a burning ball,  
Spreading darkness before the west  
And a radiant bright remnant,  
And total darkness in the east.  
The star-filled, black and open night  
Shone all around, and high  
Above the autumn moon was bright.

At a crack in time I heard  
The wind whine in the eaves,  
The city streets were littered then  
With fallen forms like fallen leaves  
Which, though they looked like fallen leaves,

Like rotting leaves, were really men.  
And every dark leaf had an eye,  
The street was choked with dead leaf-eyes,  
And all around for far and wide  
The night was full of whispered lies.

And at a crack in time I heard:  
"The written law is rhymed in lead  
The powers of the realms of gold  
Determine what is seen and said,  
Cover your ears and close your eyes  
Of all your choices, make this choice.  
An inner light will make you wise,  
A quiet word will let you be,  
A spoken word will set you free..."  
Then black wind drowned the tiny voice.

Then someone breathed upon the glass  
Who is it? What's outside?  
Breath of the clamorous numerous dead  
moving and moving through the night...  
so many cries and screams and calls  
echo through our sleep, that's also theirs  
Through millet grains we swim, despair  
of grasping what we yet do -- the door of doors

Open it -- and now what do you find?  
The incoming tide, blood burning through  
walls, a floor that's a window too,  
a sea of windows gone dark in the mind  
Yes, someone has breathed upon the glass,  
who is it? What's outside?  
Breath of the silent yet numerous dead,  
the tortured and the maimed

So many cries and screams and calls  
Echo through our sleep  
And will not stop

And at a crack in time I heard:  
"Who listens at a crack in time?  
A roach inside eternity?  
Scavenging for residues of words,  
Hear-say and syllable, rhythm, rhyme,  
Crumbs of the overwhelming Word --  
Not able to rise up and see  
The vision as it must have been  
Before the advent of trivial men  
And arrogant remorseless women"

## VII

Inside the voices that I heard  
There was a dream, a dream  
They brought me with their word  
I followed through its opening page

I followed and I followed longer  
The voices grew into a place  
They whispered on and always stronger  
Many places yet one place

And then riding I was riding  
Riding in the desert  
A blue and cobalt desert  
Between a sea and mountains

Between the sea of ebony  
And the mountains of gold and copper  
Between the sea of ice  
And the mountains of green fire

I am riding and my horse  
Is moving full of powers  
The powers of thought and movement  
And the powers of will and fear

The powers of all torments  
The hundred powers of desire  
My horse is many horses  
That move and flow beneath me

I'm one yet many riders  
I'm one and yet a hundred  
A hundred and a thousand  
A thousand and yet one

The landscape flows behind me  
And it opens up in front  
It opens up in front of me  
And it closes up behind

The sand hills flush to red  
Day is opening its jaws  
The sun is a huge spider  
And dew is glistening on shrubs

The dew on glistening shrubs  
Is the spider web of the sun  
Sand valleys and sand hills  
Are fired pink and red

The sun is a white furnace  
Opened between the mountains  
I feel the opened furnace  
From beyond its icy hills

Now the desert sand is amber  
Like the smooth pelt of a tiger  
And the tiger of the sand  
Is striped with crooked shadows

I never look behind me  
Not even when I sleep  
I slept and slept I lay in sleep  
For many nights for many nights  
But now it is broad day

The shadows on the sand  
Are black and point one way  
They say, go back go back  
Pointing back where I came from

The steady horse beneath me  
I am going toward the sun  
I am waiting for the desert  
To unfold itself and it does

Now how I love you green O green  
Green branches in the wind  
The desert flowed away at last  
The amber crust of sand

My love is green she's green as grass  
Green with her upraised arms  
Her huge and very bright green eyes  
Searching for my hidden love  
I came into the river country

The sun was low behind the trees  
That its blood splattered through  
On black earth it was dying  
In profuse and silent agony

I watched the crucifixion  
And holy burning of the sun  
And I was splattered with the blood  
Of ten suns and of twenty suns

For forty nights I waited there  
To go on further through  
The deep green wood the sun had made  
My eyes were two white suns

My amber eyes like a tiger's eyes  
My hay green and hay yellow eyes  
Were like my lovers eyes  
I watched and waited for her call

I waited at the river's edge  
The river flowed and flowed  
It called for me to enter  
And it called for me to come

I came into the river's country  
The river at night I heard its sounds  
The river at night must think and feel  
In strange sounds from its open mouth

The trees had eyes their bark  
Had faces as I passed beneath  
Their branches were their arms  
They lifted high black streaming hair

My horses felt the breathing  
Of the woods around so close  
And near the river's mist the air  
Was like a woman's breath

Steps and steps of horses  
Horse of shadows shadow horses  
Flowed amid the waving trees  
That hung by moonlight in the stream

The sun gone down the sky was huge  
Deep black the stars were falling sparks  
The circle of the shining moon  
Burned in the water gold

My shadow horses and I swam  
We swam into the moon's circle  
We broke it with a shimmering wedge  
It glittered back when we had passed

The river's water raked and pulled  
It sucked us in it drew  
Us in so steadily  
The current the dark undertow

I felt that time had stopped  
We didn't seem to move  
The night was damp and very cold  
My horse's breath was frost

The bank came near and there  
I met the Indian the morning sun  
Burned in the tree's inverted crotch  
He stood there tall in streaming light

He stood up in the oak tree  
In the crotch of a tall oak  
Then he was at my side  
He raised his hand his eyes were green

His teeth were yellow like dried corn  
He smiled and smiled for me to smile  
I looked around my horse was gone  
Gone with the shadows of the night

We walked all day and then at night  
We camped he made a fire  
I hadn't realized how cold it was  
My hands and face were numb

The fire was hot my skin got warm

Beyond the green and yellow flames  
I saw his face observing mine  
It floated in the fire's streaming  
Like the moon in the water's streams

It flickered and floated in the fire  
It floated down to the fire's sticks  
And then blew out a cloud of sparks  
It floated around and floated up

It floated up to the fire's crown  
Then suddenly it was the sun  
The night had gone the day had come  
He and the fire both were gone

I walked on through the tall tall trees  
Through domes of leaves and leafy crowns  
The sun placed fingers on my skin  
Like a buyer fingering some cloth

And then there was a field of ash  
Long houses once the Iroquois  
Were burned and everything was burned  
The houses of the Iroquois

Their land was burned just ash  
Was left and nothing left but ash  
The smell of burnt skin burning wood  
The charred white ashes smoking still

The glowing embers here  
And there a woman sat  
Upon the ground weeping with her long black hair  
Her long and black and blackest hair

Her hair fell down before her breast  
And at her breast her child  
Stared up with open eyes  
As black as buttons and as dead

Its head fell back as limp  
As any rag doll's head  
My shadow in the sun  
Passed silently over both of them

Bodies and parts of bodies  
There were bodies thrown everywhere  
Legs torn off and arms ripped loose  
Torsos without arms or legs  
Heads with no faces charred faces

Charred faces with no eyes or nose  
Intestines blue and bluish green  
Like rotted sausage casings  
Spilled from the stomach of a woman  
Who lay with both her arms tossed wide

Her naked child still clung  
To one half-severed leg  
It squirmed and fussed and cried aloud  
Its mother could not hear

A corpse was rotting in the road  
It had ballooned to twice its size  
Its legs were greenish grey  
And its face was black as tar

Then near a ditch I saw a man  
Who slowly pulled himself along  
Crawling forward on his palms  
Both of his legs were torn off

Blood came in a pulsing gargle  
From his nose and from his mouth  
He seemed to be screaming screaming screaming  
But all was choked and drowned with blood

One leg was ripped off at the thigh  
A little above the knee  
The other was ripped loose from the hip  
With part of the buttock too

He made a trail of thick blood  
Blood from both legs stumps  
And blood came from his anus too  
He seemed to be shitting gouts of blood

I came out on the other side  
The wood birds chattered overhead  
With sounds like a million creaking gates  
Or like the whistlings of the mad

A dog came from behind a tree  
It foamed a moment then it leaped  
As though a wave had crested foamed  
And then washed over me

The back-wash was my blood  
My blood red blood green blood  
Blood spread and spurted  
From my arm its jaws were steel jaws

But then my knife was deep inside  
Its stomach it still bore down  
I buried my knife again again  
Deeper and harder every time

The dog fell like a burlap sack  
Empty and limp its face became  
A woman's face its shagged fur  
Her thick black hair her bloody hair

And then her soft inviting face  
Became a wooden skull  
A thousand bees were swarming there  
As though inside a tree

Bees are the kisses of the sun  
They swarmed around me and the sun  
Was laughing all the shrill birdsong  
Joined with the laughter of the sun

Loud laughter in the sun's green trees  
A thousand thousand bees stung me  
Bees are the kisses of the sun  
I ran as I had never run

Then it was night they fell away  
A sickness came through the forest's trees  
Whispering for me whispering  
Like a thousand women whispering

Horseman horseman horseman here  
They said so loud so quietly  
Horseman horseman horseman hear  
Everything we've come to say

I vomited the night was red  
The night was black the grass  
Was cold against my face  
My body shivered with cold sweat

I dreamed I dreamed I heard  
The movements of the grass  
The grasses kissed and tongued my ear  
Saying their tiny secrets there

I heard the insects in their world  
The ants were stirring in the dark  
Their catacombs where spirits lie  
For nights and nights and rise again

The trees were all around the night  
Was opening its many wounds  
Archaic song the deep black song  
And chanting in the moonlit leaves

Then three old women Indians  
First one then two then three  
Came close and bent to look at me  
Then silently they went away

They went away into the night  
I saw them stopping here and there  
Stopping and bending moving on  
Picking up gleanings from the field

Then deeper in the night I saw  
A large campfire and four old men  
Were sitting around it playing cards  
Talking drinking out of gourds

Their shirts were black and braided gold  
Hung round their wrinkled necks  
That shook like turkey wattles  
When they laughed their eyes were gold

They played cards laughing quietly  
And looking closely I could see  
Their cards had human limbs on them  
Their gourds were full of human blood

Their gourds were full of blood and pus  
They laughed and wiped it from their mouths  
Their arms and wrists were dried cornstalks  
Their hands were roots still caked with dirt

Their hair was yellow hair  
And the light brown of the cornstalk's hair  
It hung down in their faces faces  
Brown and cracking like cracked dirt

And then I woke the morning dew  
Shined in the grass and spiders' webs  
In every tree turned it and light  
To thin ice crystals in the leaves

I walked on in the brightening green  
The orange sun and the yellow sun  
Sparked through the leaves its beams  
Were full of radiantly spinning dust

And then I saw I spied him  
There at the clearing's edge  
He wore a black hood over his head  
The rest of him was dressed in red

Then in an eye blink he was near  
Our knives were drawn  
They scraped and flashed  
Like bright wings in the morning air

My arm was dead the cloth  
Was stiff and still blood-soaked  
It was my left arm only though  
My right arm was still good

I stabbed him in the heart  
And in his heart I dug my blade  
He fell without a word or sound  
A fear came over me just then  
I listened and I looked around

He lay there dead upon the ground  
And blood as red as red lacquer  
Was on the bright green stalks of grass  
In tiny beads and clotted smears

I don't know why I had to see  
I don't know why and so I drew  
The black hood from his head  
And saw the man's face I had killed

He smiled at me a funny smile  
Was on his lips his lips  
Were like a woman's lips  
He smiled up with a woman's face

Then neither a man nor woman smiled  
Neither a woman nor a man  
Its pelvis jerked and jerked  
As though pulled up and up by strings

But only that one part of it  
Was pulled by strings was pulled  
By strings was something dead  
Was like a puppet pulled by strings

And then it was a child's face  
That smiled there so angelically  
Smiled in the deep repose  
Of death as sweet as any sleep

And then its skin turned leather-like  
Dried and tough and stiff and brown  
As though the skin were shrinking up  
It grinned and showed its teeth  
Like parched corn purple and tobacco brown

I went on further the night came  
The trees were black shapes in the night  
The trees had gathered skeins of stars  
To wrap their heads in sparkling nets

Then suddenly there were no trees  
The ground had changed  
It opened gradually and  
I was in up to my knees

Then I was in up to my waist  
The mud was black as blackest oil  
And slippery to the touch  
And shined like oil in blue moonlight

Then night was crowded full with hands  
And arms that touched me everywhere  
Fingers that held me choking me  
The night had hands that held me fast

At first I tried to pull myself  
Out of the oil and black mud  
The more I pulled the more I sank  
The oil was like the night was infinite

The sea of oil all around me  
And like a bird stuck in crude oil  
I couldn't move my arms or legs  
My voice was choked with oily mud

I floated in the midnight sea  
I floated in the sea that smelled  
Like kerosene like gasoline  
I was a shimmer in the night's deep well

It was the well of night of time  
Everything was frozen still  
I tried to shout my thoughts echoed  
My voice was silent my silent voice

And then at once the larger trees  
Large trees enormous oak trees bent  
In the night the wind was moving  
In their branches as they hung down to me

Somehow I floated toward the trees  
Up from the depths the midnight pool  
In which the trees' reflections hung  
I drifted up and grasped their boughs

I clung to the oak tree's boughs  
The day grew slowly in its limbs  
The watery reflected tree  
Grew slowly real in the sun

And when the sun was high enough  
I saw myself I had no legs  
My legs were gone were root-like things  
The pool had rotted them away

Had rotted both my legs away  
And I was left with two  
Dead limbs that stank  
As horribly as the pool had stunk

Pale worms in clots of mud  
Wriggling things that's what I had  
O sickly rooting potato eyes  
Or a wobbly fork like a mandrake root

I tried to climb I tried to climb  
Away from what I saw  
I tried to climb away from it  
Hideous remainder of my life

Then I was in the green grass again  
Elbow on elbow hand over hand  
I clambered forward pulling grass  
In thick handfuls I barely moved

The mantis tree the mantis tree  
Each oak tree was the mantis tree  
The mantis stirred and looked at me  
With bright green eyes hay yellow eyes

Each oak tree was a mantis too  
And every mantis clutched a man  
Who hung the way that hanged men do  
Their chin tucked low and neck askew

Each mantis held a single man  
Their poses were like playing cards  
Or stained glass windows in a church  
If there's a green light shining through

The rain the rain then came the rain  
hot rain that burned and sizzled  
Through the leaves it simmered  
Burning whisper of corrosive rains

I lay there on the ground I lay  
The brilliant rain the golden rain  
Corrosive whispers of the rain  
Were seeping and seeping into me

I weakened on the ground  
And I could feel my hands  
Growing thin and growing frail  
Like metal rusting to a crust

My limbs were blood-caked  
Bandages I touched my mouth  
My mouth was numb  
And stiffened as though packed in gauze

The rain will stop the night will come  
But in the dawn I too will be  
Together with my mantis lover  
Dead inside the mantis tree

Then I will be alone with her  
Green O green I love you green  
Green branches in the wind  
The desert flowed away at last

Then I will be alone with her  
The frozen mountains and the fires  
Of the desert sun have gone  
And I will be with her alone

Riding I was riding through  
The desert through the blue night  
Of the sands between  
The frozen mountains and the sea

Between the sea of ebony  
And the mountains of bright gold  
Between the burning copper sea  
And the mountains of green fire

Riding I was riding  
And my horse was full of powers  
Powers of thought and movement  
And powers of will and fear

The powers of all torments  
And all powers of desire  
Between the sea of copper  
And the mountains of green fire

## VIII

Another night I had a dream I'd had before –  
much briefer than the one I've just recorded,  
this: a sudden pounding, then confusing shouts  
a man with a battering ram broke down the door,  
blindfolded, handcuffed, barefoot I was led out

The Special Security Police  
had come to see if I would like to talk  
My hands were bound together with a piece  
of nylon cord behind my back

My ankles tied against the chair's  
front legs, and then another cord  
was noosed around my neck and tied  
to the chair's back, there were three other chairs

There was a blinding klieg light,  
electric prods and some kind of baton,  
cigarette lighters, and once a cigarette  
and at one point a bucket of urine

There was a blindfold, and a long straight pin  
a dentist's drill, pliers and hacksaw  
a physician at one point came in --  
all strictly in accordance with the law

For see! The state of nature has returned!  
Our oil tankers have returned!  
Although the temple's floor has cracked  
The managers consult the zodiac

The wars of liberation have been won!  
Freedom from the barrel of a gun!  
Freedom for Aramco and Exxon!  
From henceforth let all nations learn  
That bank accounts can freeze and napalm burn

O heroes of the state police  
Preserving us from terroristic menace  
From dangerous drugs and from all violence  
Guard our rights at home and abroad

O heroes of the CIA  
The NSA, the FBI  
Protect us from both criminal and spy  
Guard our rights at home and abroad

You soldiers in the wars of ideology  
Aid us in the governance of thought  
Preserve us from corruption of the mind  
Guard our rights at home and abroad

## IX

When I awoke I felt around  
me in the dark of my weed-bed,  
I had to be quite sure I wasn't bound  
or dead or mutilated

I lay there in the weedy ditch  
the beauty of the morning shone  
through ghastly after-images  
I rose and was myself again

A knotty twisted apple tree  
the morning full of singing birds  
listening, breathing, knowing, I can see  
and then speak clearly with true words

I love the glassy dewes that shine  
catching the morning sun's first light  
the chill grass scent, the air like a crisp wine  
my inspiration and delight

I love the brown grass nodding, the crown vetch  
the slope of steep hill down to the road  
the stony cut where the night rain flowed  
to end up in its roadside ditch

The broach-like cage of Queen Anne's lace  
now brown and stiff, sere chicory --  
all these are beautiful no less  
than wind and cloud and have their hold on me

The stands of trees along the hill,  
the maple woods, the shadows, damp  
air in early light, the still  
expectant silence, the stone well

The pine woods where the needles fall,  
thickly covering the ground  
the quill-like matting soft to the footfall  
the pine cone dropping with a skittering sound

The yellow leaves of maples, oaks  
that cover traces of an old stone wall  
a rusted iron gate that creaks  
when you pass through it to the well

The light that burns the topmost bars  
of fir tree windows, dusty light-smoke  
mote-spinning beams of light, the hermit's  
cell of thought and silence in the noon-dark firs

I love the old dried milkweed pods --  
a curled in slit, yet still faint down  
from when their white silk threads were blown  
from fields to empty fields or woods

The poplar tree with gold leaves wet  
with morning rain, wind-rustled-through  
bright drops of water fall from it  
onto my face as I look up through

The spreading limbs of large-boled trees,  
the oak and maple and copper beech  
sun-heavy boughs, dark roots that reach  
downward into the depths of earth

Rain through the leaves and tree trunks when  
they're damp and glistening and wet --  
how absolutely clean and sweet  
the air smells after evening rain

How absolutely clean and sweet  
the air smells when the morning dew  
is thick enough to soak my old shoes through,  
my pant cuffs too, and wet my feet

But then it dries as day comes on  
and morning's clarity gives way  
to the bright warmth of the autumn day,  
rich sunlight of October sun

It heats the browning meadow still --  
you hear a special silence there,  
no cabbage whites flit through the air  
and the hum is scarcely audible

Empty sunlight and silence, near sleep  
the apple orchard smells so ripe,  
yellow jackets hover around  
some mashed windfalls fermenting on the ground

The sunlight deepens, bars lengthen with  
the afternoon, there is a loneliness  
in the empty yard, the brown dirt path  
a screen door's clap disturbs the silence

An electric saw, someone hammering far off  
there is a difference in the barn lot as the sun  
shifts slowly down -- late afternoon  
the slanted light, a grey horse is drinking at a  
trough

The light is gold, a halo on brown dirt  
the slanting rays catch motes from the cut grass  
the tree line darkens in its silhouette  
the farmer on the tractor shields his eyes

Dusk-amber light, sunset flattens low  
beyond the field and past the wood-lot hill  
where in a ragged line tree outlines go  
from dun to black, then can't be seen at all

Slowly the evening turns to night  
The farmer and his cattle meet  
to move at last in common peace  
around the one abiding place

I go with them, there all must move  
together, husband, wife, daughter, son  
amid the deep and hidden grove,  
the starry well of all creation

The star-filled well where moonlight gleams  
ripple the darkest water-void  
where Emptiness's radiant streams  
brim full the crying eye of night

X

I have two selves, two spirits, minds  
one loves the darkness and the night  
the other loves the day and light  
both entered here where day descends

Sobered in the common sleep  
I touched the unacknowledged springs  
and felt the life of earth-born things  
building as the world took shape

What can hold back the rising tide?  
And what will dam the seas of hate?  
Can nothing do it? Is it too late  
to wake a distracted multitude?

Where can the remedy be found?  
Yet only listening will bring  
forth oracles of the sleeping spring  
of wisdom from its human ground

Imagination, charity, and hope  
will rectify the unjust law --  
Vision must see and say to draw  
straight boundaries toward their human shape

I've waited on the dark hillside  
as night came on and lights came on  
below in town and run to hide  
in terror from the urban dawn

Yet in the dawn I still am there  
I listen to the morning's birds  
though all the food that place affords  
is the crab apple or the wild pear

And when the sun has gotten high  
I sit beneath a tall birch tree  
and watch the leaves and boughs against the sky  
and feel the branches move with me

I came this morning from the sun.  
against the sun I stood, and stand  
Grains of the burning beach run from my hand  
I will remain when all is done

## AFTERWORD

We first made the author's acquaintance at a well-known restaurant in Taipei, the Wysteria Tea House, famous as having been a meeting place for dissident intellectuals in the years of political struggle in Taiwan .

During the recent effort to publish his rather extensive work, we had occasion to discuss aspects of his past and current writing.

*Your poetry is quite varied in style and in form. Where do you locate yourself in the overall debate concerning poetic form?*

I consider myself an eclectic. The main thing for me is to grasp, mentally, a certain object -- that is, an experience, a scene, an event -- to see it and feel it. Any language that seems to convey the reality of that is good, any which remains merely language, merely words, is for me of no interest, in some cases it is actively negative, in the sense of being obstructive.

*A cliché?*

Yes or not even a cliché but in a way worse than that. Much of our language obscures the nature of reality. Words in themselves are, in a sense, the enemy of writing. I tell students that all the time. Words most often merely convey the usual accepted social understanding. Writing is for the purpose of grasping reality itself, which is always something other than the social understanding.

*Do you consider yourself a political writer?*

All writing is political in the sense of attempting to correct these false social understandings. At times its purpose is to merely reveal with a new freshness, a perceptual freshness, as it were. But even this itself has a certain basic political significance, in the sense that awakened human beings will act and think differently than those who are at rest in the normal tranquilized non-perception that we usually are caught up in.

*Does living outside the United States help or hinder your writing?*

I think it helps, in general. It is in some ways a very undeveloped culture, yet in other ways it is overbearing. (The US, that is.) There is, for example, a great deal of rather stifling political correctness, as it's called, and to get away from that is itself a positive thing. For a while I had no idea how I would ever get all this material published, especially if you're not there trying to do all the "networking" that is needed, and which I was absolutely terrible at anyway -- worse than terrible, I really had no clue, I still don't, I suppose. And then it came about that you could just do it all by yourself, by means of the internet.

*How much material is it? It's quite a lot, it would seem.*

Yes, I guess it's about 50 volumes or so. Over 2,000 pages, if you want to measure it like that. I don't know how much it would weigh.

*There seem to be many styles represented. Was that something you consciously strove for?*

Yes. I always wanted to be able to represent a wide variety of experiences. My first models for the artist were people such as Picasso, Goethe, Bach -- artists who could work in a very wide range of forms and even use widely different styles. Of course, I can't compare myself to people like that, but it was still a goal, to try many types of things.

*What sorts of things are you working on currently?*

Well as you know I am trying to get all this existing work published, going through it, touching it up here and there, proofreading, and so forth. After that, I think I might return to some translating work -- Holderlin especially, and some Chinese poets, but don't ask me which ones.

## About the Author

Steven Frattali is an expatriate American writer living in Taipei. He is the author to date of over 50 volumes of poetry, now being published in ebook and print form by The Banyan Press of Taipei. He is also the author of several critical works, among them *Person, Place and World: A Late Modern Reading of Robert Frost* and *Hypodermic Light: The Poetry of Philip Lamantia and the Question of Surrealism*.

## About the Banyan Press of Taipei

The Banyan Press of Taipei was founded in 2008 by Samuel Palmer and Steven Frattali. It plans to publish the work of expatriate Anglophone writers of the Pacific Rim who are working outside the norms of mainstream publishing. The Press does not at this time invite submissions, but it hopes to do so in the future.